



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
H 817z
v. 2

The person charging this material is responsible for its return to the library from which it was withdrawn on or before the **Latest Date** stamped below.

Theft, mutilation, and underlining of books are reasons for disciplinary action and may result in dismissal from the University.

To renew call Telephone Center, 333-8400

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

NOV 06 1961

ZOE'S 'BRAND.'

ZOE'S 'BRAND.'

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"RECOMMENDED TO MERCY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1864.

[The right of translation is reserved.]

LONDON : PRINTED BY W. CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET,
AND CHAEING CROSS.

823
H8173
v. 2

ZOE'S 'BRAND.'

CHAPTER I.

'O baneful cause! O fatal morn!
Accursed of ages yet unborn.'

No visible or immediate consequences followed in Mr. Gordon's family on the tragical end of Angélique's only child. If the 'massa railed,' he did so in her hearing only. He never spoke of the event either to Clarice or his daughter; indeed, the former had experienced so severe a mental shock that any allusion to the landing at the Levée was carefully avoided both by Zoe, and those in attendance on the suffering woman.

But although the devoted and unselfish daughter guarded her mother with exceeding

care from any chance recurrence to the sad scene they had witnessed, she had been far from forgetful of the unfortunate creature whose dearest earthly blessing had been so ruthlessly snatched from her.

To a distant chamber of a small wooden hut, at the extremity of the garden, the body of little Freddy was carefully conveyed. There, for a few short hours, the mother watched beside him, absorbed in grief, with her dark face covered by a handkerchief, and her hands clasped convulsively on her forehead. At sunset on the following day a grave was dug outside the city in the dreary burial-place appropriated to the negro race, and Zoe, thoughtful still, ordered a hackney carriage, driven by a coloured man, to bear the tiny body to its resting-place.

‘Poor soul,’ she whispered, as the mother, tearless and silent, sat for hours previous to her departure on the wooden seat, with the small coffin on her knees ; ‘poor soul, if you would pray to God to give you comfort, He

would hear you. He has taken your poor baby to himself; but if you are patient, and do your duty here, you may hope, through the mercy of Jehovah, to find him yet in heaven.'

'Dat what I tell Angy, Miss Zoe. I tell her to sing a verse of the good hymn that Madam Clariss taught us:—

“ Jerusalem, our happy home,
Name ever dear to me,—
When shall my sorrows have an end,
When—”'

'Dare, dat enough,' said Angy, breaking in abruptly on the unmelodious droning sounds emitted from the thick lips of her sable friend. 'Dat enough; you come along and tell dat nigger not to hurry.'

These were the only words she uttered. She never looked at Zoe, nor said a syllable in answer to her exhortation, and the latter grieved as the carriage rolled slowly through the gate bearing the dead child as it rested on the lap of that grief-hardened and half-desperate woman.

The weather, for the place and season, was at that time unusually cold, and in many spots of ground on which the sun's rays did not fall a slight sprinkling of snow, an unusual sight at New Orleans, was to be seen in the less-frequented streets, and in the neighbourhood of the city.

But for all this, a blazing sun shone fiercely on the *trottoir* (the broad flagged pavement is called a *trottoir* instead of a 'side-walk' in the French quarter of New Orleans), and cold though it was, the scene, barring the snowy sprinkling, looked tropical enough.

Everything, save and except the negro faces which meet the eye at every turn, everything in the busy Crescent City strikes the passer-by as singularly white and dazzling. The houses are white—the dresses of the male inhabitants seem to be in some sort made to match, while along the far-stretching *Levée* on which the hot sun glares perpetually are deposited bales of snow-white cotton and barrels of equally hueless flour, these being

the staple commodities conveyed by the monster *white* steamers down the broad rushing river—rushing past the busy city to the still more restless sea.

But whiter still than all besides, shines forth the great monster hotel—the towering St. Charles—with its high, imposing dome, a pile of unsubstantial brick and wood work, now, alas! immortalized as the scene of General Butler's blunders and atrocities, whereby he has earned for himself a world-wide, but no honourable fame.

The house occupied by Mr. Gordon's family was situated on the outskirts of the city, and on the road towards the Lake of Pontchartrain. A pleasant abode enough it was, with spacious rooms, a shady green verandah, and a garden, filled (despite the unwonted signs of winter on the ground) with gaudy oleanders and orange-trees still laden with their golden fruit. This garden was behind the house, and Zoe took infinite delight in wandering beneath the plantain and the

Pride of India trees, by which the walks were shaded. Her mother had rallied slightly since their arrival. A learned doctor who had studied many years in Europe, and had walked the hospitals both of Paris and the three great cities of the United Kingdom, had discovered palliatives for her complaint, although he neither hoped himself, nor held out expectations to her family, that Mrs. Gordon would ever know an hour's health again. There was no need to tell the patient, ailing woman, that the time was come when she must make her peace with Heaven ; no need to warn her that the heavy burthen she had borne so long, the burthen of a willingly-indulged in sin, must soon be laid in deep humility at the foot of the Saviour's Holy Cross, where, only, she could hope for mercy. She knew her days were numbered, and heavy grew her heart within her ; but, yet she strove to call a cheerful smile upon her lip when talking to her child ; and still for him, for Jaspar, for the man whom (often as

he had betrayed and outraged her) she nourished in her heart of hearts a never-failing spring of love,—for him she would still deck her person with bright gewgaws, and laugh her own sweet laugh, low, musical, and womanly, when Mr. Gordon's mild powers of facetiousness, few and far between, were exerted for her entertainment.

CHAPTER II.

‘O Life! How pleasant is thy morning,
Young Fancy’s rays the hills adorning!
Cold, pausing Caution’s lessons scorning.
We frisk away,
Like school-boys at th’ expected warning,
To joy and play.’

ZOE GORDON being endowed with a full proportion of the quickness of observation common to her sex, was not long in making some of the discoveries so greatly dreaded by her mother, regarding her own, and that beloved parent’s, social position: nor had she been more than a week established in New Orleans before the truth became painfully apparent that between them and the purely coloured white ladies who thronged the streets and churches—the playhouses and assembly-rooms, a great gulf was fixed.

At the cathedral, where the fair girl

knelt in prayer, the chair on which she leant was not placed amongst the haughty dames who swept so grandly by her in their rustling silks, but was set apart and in a distant place where the preacher's voice could hardly reach her ears. She thought it cruel, at first, and her proud lips curled with anger as she took her humble place; but soon the bitter temper softened, and she forgot, while praying meekly to her God that in His sacred house, she had no friend but Him.

At seventeen, with beauty, health, and a naturally sweet cheerful temper, it is next to impossible to be long unhappy. Besides the evident, though fallacious improvement in her mother's health, was sufficient in itself to make bright Zoe's spirit sing for joy. She had so many pleasures too, provided for her by her father's kindness, a horse to ride—a little prancing Arab, white, with flecks of burnished-brown upon his silken coat; and Zoe had no enjoyment

to be compared to that of cantering upon Sultan along the straight flat road, where all the beauty and the fashion of the city assembled in the afternoon for exercise and amusement.

In addition to the black groom in showy livery who followed his young mistress on a massive carriage horse, Zoe could boast as her constant attendant of an elderly Spanish gentleman, who was well content to be the pretty creature's escort.

M. de Ribiera had reached his seventieth year, and was unmarried. A gay old bachelor he was, who if the voice of rumour could be relied on had shown himself no Stoic during the passing of the threescore years and ten, which sat so lightly on his yet almost unwrinkled brow. A very fine old man was Don José de Ribiera, and a worshipper of beauty in its every form and colour. Between Miss Gordon's father and the Spanish planter there had existed one of those life-long intimacies which

society has tolerated in the rich since the world of fashion began, and woman's power had risen to its height. A very lovely woman was Jaspar Gordon's mother, even when her charms were somewhat on the wane, and if the Spanish gentleman did not see unmoved those feminine attractions, the fault perhaps was not altogether his, but fate's, which threw him in the beauteous creole's path. Nearly half a century before there had been whispers, very faint, and easily hushed down, about the actual parentage of Jaspar Gordon. It did not matter much, for be she white or coloured there is much leniency evinced for the soft failings of the Southern ladies. No need to preach to them about the duty of forbearance; no need to quote to those half French, and more than half tropical beauties the solemn words of warning—

'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.'

To perform that womanly act of bar-

barism there is an amount of energy required which is utterly at variance with the indolence characteristic of Southern nature. Imagine those fair creatures whose *spécialité* it is to lounge on sofas through the live-long hours, troubling their lazy selves by working up a tale of mystery and scandal to the proper pitch of interest for the world of female gossips! Such an exertion would be death to those luxurious drones, who grow—it is their beauty's only fault, to a 'Dudu'-like scale of size when scarcely past their teens, and who then think their time is come to 'shut up' altogether, receiving visitors at home it is true, but rarely showing to the outer world the too luxuriant loveliness of their soft, yielding forms.

This, however, is a digression, as also indeed is the question, long before delicately mooted, concerning the Don's interest in the dark browed Jaspár. With such antecedents we have nothing to do, it being

sufficient to our purpose to relate the fact that M. de Ribiera continued to the son the friendship of which he had given to the father (or let us say the parents) manifold proofs, and that when pretty Zoe made her appearance amidst the society which alone the 'Planters' ladies' could command, the courteous, kind old gentleman relieved his friend as much as possible from the often irksome *chaperonage* of his daughter. A fairer sight than Zoe Gordon in her riding hat adorned with a flowing feather plucked from the red wing of the flamingo, and mounted on her caracoling Arab steed, had rarely been seen even in the city where beauty meets you at every step and turn. There was a lithe gracefulness in her figure which told of European 'raising,' and a clear colouring painted by the fresh wind on her delicate cheek, and revealing to every passer by the fact that Zoe had come straight from lands beyond the sea.

A week had elapsed since little Freddy's

death, and Zoe was being equipped by Angy for her ride. To be waited upon at every moment by a ready slave had soon become a pleasant habit with the light-hearted girl, who had a kindly word for all, but more especially for the bereaved and silent Angélique.

The latter was behind her chair, braiding the gold-tinted hair that was a handful for her skilful fingers, so thick it was, and waving like the rebellious coils of a live shining snake. Angy stood behind the chair, clad in deep mourning garments, and bound the glossy coronal round the graceful head, smoothing each straying hair from the fair temples, where the blue veins shone as in a network through the transparent skin, and leaving each line of the classically-formed cheek in its unshaded beauty.

‘Make haste, Angy, please—my *bottines*, for I have been so long that Sultan will be tired of waiting.’

The little foot stamped on the floor impatiently, as high-bred Sultan might have struck

the ground with his flint-like hoof; and when the perfect *chaussure*, a *chef-d'œuvre* from Melnotte's famous *Magasin*, was brought by Angy; at the gay girl's bidding she let the slave-woman lift the pretty silk-clad foot, and clothe it with its dainty covering.

The dusky face was bending forward so that Zoe did not see the cruel look which lurked, and had done ever since her baby's death, in Angy's deep set eyes. Those eyes which night and day, in joy or sorrow, seemed for ever on their restless watch.

The menial task against which vain Angy in her heart rebelled, did not take long in doing, and Zoe with her bare white shoulders, and the fair girlish bust only half-shaded by its scanty covering, stood ready for the last touches of the soubrette's practised hand. The lace was tightened slightly, and the all-disguising crinoline removed, when a slight tap upon the door caused the young girl to start.

'Dar be Massa Seymour in de keeping-

room, Miss Zoe,' said Cæsar's voice outside; 'Massa Charles Seymour from de St. Louis Hotel. Missus is in de garden, and I jiz said Miss Zoe all undressed—but he only laugh at dat. He berry funny gen'l'man, and say he wait Miss Zoe in de keeping-room.'

If Zoe had been inclined to hasten Angy's movements when only Sultan's convenience was in question, how much the more eager was she for despatch when the news was brought her that he, the hero of her fancy, whose image had occupied her thoughts for weeks, was—as black Cæsar simply announced—in the 'keeping' *alias* drawing room, and waiting for her coming.

A flood of rosy blushes spread over cheek and brow, ay even to the warm white of the round neck about which Angy was employed in fastening the small cambrie collar. Very glad felt Zoe that she was beautiful, when thinking of the visitor whose unexpected presence in the house had made such havoc in her maiden breast.

‘Oh! Angy, quick! not that—the *cerise* ribbon. I must look well to-day. And is my hair quite smooth? There; that will do. My gauntlets and my whip—the one that Pauline gave me with the coral handle. How long I’ve kept him,’—this was murmured to herself. ‘Suppose that he has grown tired, and has gone,’—and Zoe, frightened by the dark void her fancy had called up, donned with eager haste her flamingo-plumed hat, and hurried down the stairs.

Following her—although the fair girl guessed it not—were Angy’s looks of hatred and revenge; while the dark, dangerous woman muttered through her ivory teeth words which would have chilled—had she but heard them—Zoe’s blood within her veins, and sent her to that blissful meeting with other, and far gloomier anticipations in her girlish heart.

CHAPTER III.

‘I sigh to think how soon that brow
In grief may lose its every ray,
And that light heart so joyous now
Almost forget it once was gay.’

CHARLES SEYMOUR was standing by the open window and looking out into the sunlit garden. He saw a female figure pacing slowly on the gravelly walk—a figure which he had no difficulty in identifying as Zoe’s mother, and earnestly he hoped that no sudden, and to him most unpropitious impulse would induce the invalid to seek the shelter of the house.

He stood there waiting eagerly for the girl whom he had last seen pale, almost sad, and with a dimmed and almost faded loveliness. Since that time he had thought much of that sweet and, as it seemed to him, that little-appreciated maiden. Nevertheless, he had

not striven to retain the memory of Gordon's daughter in his breast ; for none knew better than the man whose life had been for the most part spent amidst the wildest dissipations of European cities, to what must lead an intimacy with that beautiful but hapless girl. Still, had any virtue-loving and officious friend suggested the expediency of a vow on his part, never to seek again the young slave-lady's presence, Seymour would have refused at once — refused with promptitude and vehemence, for unwittingly this girl had taken a strong hold upon his fancy, and there were moments when he yearned with almost painful longing to behold her lovely face once more. Had he not chanced to meet the kindly Natchez doctor, who, with his gentle wife, had pitied Zoe, during the dreary river voyage ; and had not sober-minded Dr. Lane dwelt somewhat largely on Zoe's personal charms, the chances were, that the evil, if not arrested, might have been considerably delayed.

But the good doctor and his wife had formed a plan for Zoe by which they hoped she might escape the great hereditary evil of her lot; and it was to rich and chivalrous Charles Seymour that they chiefly looked for its realization.

To be the inmate of a wealthy English lady's home seemed no unhappy fate for Zoe, and the doctor being well aware that Charley was possessed of many influential European friends, forthwith consulted him on the chances of obtaining an eligible situation as governess for the accomplished daughter of the Southern planter. A smile of deep and peculiar meaning—almost a wicked smile it was—just flickered across Charley's handsome face as he listened to his friend's proposition, which, by the way, was made in the ladies' room of the St. Louis Hotel, where Charles had taken up his quarters. He made, however, no outward objection to the plan, only, as the time for afternoon visiting had arrived, he ordered his

horse, and rode away in the direction of Mr. Gordon's house.

He had not been many minutes in the drawing-room (they had seemed an age to him), when from a sunny corner where its gilded cage was hung, a mocking-bird's clear note rang out upon the stillness—

'Zoe—Zoe—pretty Zoe,' it said, plainly as a human voice could have sung out the words,—so plainly indeed that Seymour, who had not before noticed the cunning creature's presence, was quite startled by the sounds, repeated as they were so often, and with an emphasis quite wonderful.

'Zoe; Zoe! pretty Zoe—pretty, pretty Zoe,' cried the bird, as it bowed and curtsied on its perch, jerking up and down its long brown tail as if in ecstasy of happiness.

A sudden pang of jealousy seized upon the listener. 'Good Good!' he thought, 'who could have taught the bird to-day such words

as these? Some admirer of course—some odious countryman of his own—some d—d rich merchant, possibly, or perhaps a Yankee fellow, who—for he knew them well—had impudence for anything.' These unpleasant surmises were sufficiently exasperating without the aggravation of being compelled to listen to the perpetual *refrain*, which only ceased when on purpose, as it almost appeared, to complete the discomfiture of Zoe's admirer, it burst out into a laugh so human, so sarcastic, and so thrilling, that Seymour, whose disposition was somewhat hasty, could, but for the known infection of such cachinnatory sounds, have almost felt inclined to wring the neck of the small aggravating animal. As it was however, and rather fortunately as regarded his own character for forbearance, the merry solo had merged into a duet, when the door opened, and the radiant apparition of Zoe, equipped for conquest and her afternoon ride, appeared before him.

At first, man of the world as he was, and equal to most situations (especially to those in which women bear a part), Seymour was too much surprised to have words at his command. With Zoe it was different, for no outward change had taken place in Charley Seymour. He was still the hero she had dreamt of—still the man whose height and magnificent proportions, whose keenly searching eyes and handsome face, had first inspired her with what, in a more experienced woman, might have borne no other name than passion.

She came forward at once, and offered her gloved hand to her visitor.

'I have kept you waiting long, I fear,' she said, and her voice trembled slightly as she spoke; 'I have kept you waiting long, but you have had little Kit to keep you company.'

By Kit she meant the mocking-bird, who had not yet recovered from his unseasonable fit of hilarity, whereat they laughed out

merrily, and then the thin coat of ice being effectually broken, conversation went on swimmingly.

'I told you I should see you at New Orleans,' Charley said. He had drawn a chair very near to her, and was looking closely in her eyes, bringing thereby another sudden blush into her cheek, which lingered there, and made her beauty seem quite heavenly to the man who gazed upon it.

'I told you I should see you, and I always keep my word. If you had not been here I should have got on board one of those horrid steamers, and found my way to Orange Creek Plantation.'

Zoe heard him with a kind of wrapt attention. She knew he must expect some answer or remark, but strange to say—for nature had not made her shy—words would not come at her command, and she was beginning to repent the eager haste with which she had obeyed the summons to the 'keeping-room,' when Cæsar's woolly head obtruded itself

through the heavy *portière*, while his cracked, discordant voice, announced that Massa Ribberrairer had called upon de ladies, and was waiting for Miss Zoe outside de garden gate.'

CHAPTER IV.

‘The fire i’ the flint
Shows not till it be struck.’

‘MONSIEUR DE RIBIERA, my father’s oldest friend ; you know him, I am sure,’ said Zoe, as she preceded Charley from the room, stopping for a moment to glance back (it was almost her first look) at her companion.

‘Ribberarier — O yes’—said Seymour, laughing. Of course I do—ancient José—why, he must be a century old at least. A safe chaperon at any rate. So he has called for his fair consignment, has he ?’

There was a tone in his voice which Zoe did not like. Besides his words sounded in her ear almost offensively. What right had he to speak to her in such familiar fashion. ‘Safe’ indeed ! What an implication was conveyed in those four letters ! and what was

she to him that he should assume this species of authority over her actions?

These thoughts flashed with the speed of lightning through her brain, and throwing off the kind of nameless fear which had possessed her during their short previous *tête-à-tête*, she answered in a tone of quiet sarcasm worthy almost of a practised woman of the world,—

‘You speak as if I were a piece of merchandise—dry goods, as they call them in the shops. I shall begin to think that no one in this town can speak in other language than that of storekeepers.’

Her short and perfect upper lip was slightly curled, and there was a sudden flash, lighting up her long shaped languid eyes, which raised the admiration of her lover (for so we may justly call him) to its utmost height.

He saw the struggle in her breast, and guessed the cause—guessed that her woman’s pride was warring against the mortifying con-

sciousness of her position; and from that moment, Seymour foreseeing in his path difficulties before undreamt of, grew determined to succeed in a pursuit which promised the rare pleasure of excitement.

With a tact acquired in countries where men have time to learn the lessons of politeness, his manner, ay, even his very looks, as they were directed to the Octaroon, changed to the high-bred obsequiousness, which without loss of self-respect the most independent of mankind may show to youth and beauty. It was a dangerous change for Zoe—dangerous—since it threw a fascination round the well-skilled actor more powerful than before—and especially perilous to the inexperienced girl, inasmuch as the movements of the enemy being veiled by a curtain impenetrable to her sight, the necessity for watchfulness was forgotten, and prudence went to sleep upon its post.

Friendly greetings were exchanged between De Ribiera and Zoe's new attendant. It was

long since they had met, some dozen years perhaps, and during that time Charles Seymour had grown up from a fair but rather precocious boy, into a stalwart man, carrying with him an air of mingled French and English fashion; and on his fine expressive face, the impress (which the experienced Don at once discovered) of many an hour spent in feverish excitement, and in the haunts of vicious dissipation.

But notwithstanding this evidence of a fact to which Seymour's numerous Continental friends would have borne ample testimony, there was an air of refinement about the man's whole bearing, denoting, and denoting truly, that he had as yet never indulged in those grosser, and degrading vices which render the participator in them utterly incapable of appreciating what may be termed the romance and poetry of life. To women, even to the old and plain, his manner was always deferential and respectful, while to the young and lovely of their sex he

joined to this habitual deference a kind of caressing worship which was infinitely attractive.

They rode along the crowded streets, thronged by pleasure-seekers on foot and in open carriages—masked and unmasked—men, women, and children, all bent upon enjoying to the utmost the varied and boisterous pleasures of the Carnival.

It was no easy matter to make their way through the often serried-masses of the revellers. The season was one when, as in the Roman Saturnalia of old, almost unlimited licence was allowed to the poor as well as to the rich—to the ill-clothed whisky-drinking Irish 'navvy,' and to the well-got-up city negroes—the coloured domestic servants, gorgeous in silk and crinolines—tall, shining hats, coats with swallow-tails, and *pants* of dazzling whiteness,

On they rushed—a noisy, shouting, laughing crew, flinging about their harmless mortar missiles, and their not always equally harmless

jests and repartees. For New Orleans is a city where the blood runs hot within the veins, and where a biting word is often dealt with by a death-giving stab.

On they went, those three equestrians, with Sam, Mr. Gordon's coal-black groom, following at a distance; for the attractive scene kept a constant grin upon his ugly face, and made him forget his easy service as attendant on his graceful mistress.

Meantime, the wilful Arab Sultan, impatient of delay and eager for his wonted gallop, chafed on the bit, and tossed his well-bred head as Zoe's light hand reined him in amongst the crowd. To ride three abreast had soon become impossible; but despite of every obstacle, Seymour had retained his place beside his charge, and with his hand firmly placed upon the pommel of her saddle, kept a watchful eye on all around. He knew well the temper of his countrymen, and that even a single movement of the eager animal she rode might call down mischief on her head.

For had not that fair, blooming creature come of a race, from one of whom even the slightest imagined insult would be visited as a crime? And should poor Sultan's glossy shoulders press too hardly against one of those free-born citizens—there were Yankee men and women in that crowd, beings with narrow prejudices, but of high-sounding philanthropic words, who would have been the first to visit on the rider the aggressions of the steed.

So Charley Seymour, riding close beside her, did not for an instant relax his watchful care; and more than once the powerful weight both of himself and his strong fiery thorough-bred horse kept off from her the pressure of the throng, and earned for him a grateful smile from lips which were beginning to lose some of their carnation hue.

They had turned their horses' heads, through Camp Street, to Lafayette Square—a direction that the gentlemen of the little party would have carefully avoided had they formed any previous conception of the density of the

crowd through which they would be forced to pass. A very drunken crowd it was too, taken as a whole, and one in which delicate female ears might be assailed with many a coarse jest and sound of vulgar ribaldry. There, too, might be heard, mingling together in dire confusion, complaints, shouts, and execrations, both in French and English; while, close beside Zoe's impatient steed a well-dressed, elderly man was addressing the crowd with a tipsy gravity which under other circumstances might have been amusing enough.

'That was a mighty 'cute remark of somebody's that the world turned round. Round and round and round it's going now—I'm cussed if it ain't, old hosses! Look out there! Isn't the big lamp turning round, and isn't it a making as many faces at me as a clown in a circus? Strikes me! I'll have an eye-opener myself, or else a "pig-and-whistle." I say—but here a movement in the crowd happily removed the noisy orator, *nolens volens*, from the neighbourhood of the equestrians, but only

to make room for other rowdy spirits as obnoxious as himself.

‘Vake, Lady Vake!’ sang out a drunken French keeper of a restaurant. ‘Pretty lady want a private room. I keep one gran’, one first-rate restaurant. I keeps de turkeys boil, de turkeys roas’, de turkeys *fricassée*, de turkeys gombo, de turkeys ebery way—’

‘Confound you for a drunken brute!’ roared Seymour, pressing his horse’s chest against the intoxicated Frenchman, till he fell back helplessly against the foremost ranks; and then, looking pityingly at the pale-faced girl, ‘Don’t be afraid,’ he whispered; ‘we shall soon be out of it; only please not to faint. Unmannerly brutes they are, though, to crowd so rudely round a woman! So ho! gently there. Back, man!’ he shouted, as a masked figure of unusual height, but far from proportionate width, elbowed his way through the forest of swaying multitudes, till he came within arm’s length of Zoe’s horse.

The animal was almost literally dancing with excitement, and could only be kept from breaking out into some unseemly demonstration of violence by the small hand which in its dainty gauntlet patted and stroked the neck, so proudly arched above that surging throng.

'Back, fellow!' shouted Seymour, as the mask—a hideous one, with long projecting nose, and grinning teeth—approached so near to Zoe, pressing between the horses, that she could perceive, through two round apertures, wild, bleared, eager eyes, red-rimmed and sensual-looking. He took no notice of Seymour's passionate remonstrance, but grasped at Zoe's flowing habit, as if to save himself from being again dragged back into the crowd. Then Seymour, roused to the highest pitch of exasperation, struck the lean, bony hand with the heavy silver handle of his riding whip, till the wretch howled with pain. But, great as was the agony he was enduring, such was the tenacity of the masked man's purpose that his

hold upon the lady's skirt was not relaxed, though muttered curses came both fast and thick from between his close-clenched teeth ; and then it was that Seymour, rendered furious by opposition, let go his hold upon the pommel, and spurring his own steed against his foe, bade fair to crush him by the onset.

The head and shoulders of the stranger appeared for a moment between the frightened, goaded steeds ; and then a knife, long, keen, and pointed, shimmered in the bright winter's sun, with sharpened point turned towards Zoe's champion. Another moment—one single second more, and deep in his heart would have been sheathed the murderous weapon, for the assassin held the keen blade in his left hand, while with the other he still retained his hold, inflexible as the stiffened grasp of a dead man's fingers, upon the young girl's raiment.

Her horror and affright at being thus seized and retained by the ruffian were greater than can be described. Already had the sight of

that bewildering sea of frightful masks, and costumes more ridiculous than picturesque, thrown her mind in some sort into confusion. Already had a sudden fear begun to tighten round her brain that her faculties might become momentarily stultified by the distracting sounds and sights around her; and now—now, like a terrible nightmare, impossible to escape from or shake off, an iron hand whose odious touch she felt with thrilling detestation on her knee, retained her there against her will, and with a power which seemed to her irresistible.

As long as Seymour's fingers rested on the pommel of her saddle, Zoe had controlled her fears, for her trust, both in his will and power to defend her, was unlimited; but when her guardian left her side, left her with that monster's grinning parchment face so near her own, she could have screamed aloud, so great and overwhelming was her terror.

At that moment—the moment when the fate of him she loved was hanging, as it were,

upon a thread—there was a momentary opening in the crowd, a dispersing of the multitude in search of fresh amusement ; and Zoe's horse, taking instant advantage of the chance for liberty, threw up his eager head, and darted forward, dragging with him, however, the still clinging form of the masked assailant. It was for a few yards only, but they were enough to save the life of Charley Seymour, who, separated from Zoe by the compact ranks of human bodies pressing onward in their selfish haste, had almost overlooked his own danger while striving to return and succour her.

Panting, half-breathless, with streaming hair, and choked by the hoarse curses in his throat, the object of Zoe's alarm contrived, in spite of Sultan's desperate plunges, to transfer his hold from the girl's habit to the bridle of her horse ; and then, whether the act was one of thoughtlessness or to calm her terrors, he threw aside the bowie-knife, and raised his right hand to his head. Another

second, and Zoe would have recognized the ruffian, whose rough wooing, if such indeed it were, had sent the life-blood from her cheek and lips ; but just—apparently at least—as he was about to remove his mask, the sudden re-appearance of Charles Seymour arrested his purpose, and before the latter could be aware of his purpose, he had darted down a street at right angles to the one in which the scene had been enacted, and was speedily lost to sight amongst the crowd.

CHAPTER V.

‘ But thou art love itself.

.

Such emotion

Must end in sin or sorrow.’

TOWARDS the end of February the warm early spring had set in for good at New Orleans. The north wind had rushed back to its icy home amidst the Polar Seas; the dirge of the dying year had long since been sung and forgotten; and the opening buds were bursting forth on the bare but graceful boughs, as if in salutation of the coming summer.

Already the forest birds were singing their love-songs to the opening spring—pretty, but songless, feathered bipeds were glancing in the sun—green things and red, with the humming-birds of many hues, darting like large gorgeous summer-bees over the early

blossoms in the well-kept gardens round the city.

Zoe, as the sudden spring broke out, revelled in a kind of ecstasy amongst the flowers, which nowhere grow in a richer profusion than in the neighbourhood of New Orleans. She had never before imagined, much less seen, so great a wealth of floral treasures. In Paris, that flower-loving city, bouquets of pale Parma violets, of exquisite *gardenias* and *stephanotis*, of orange-flowers and sweet roses of Bengal, were, even in the summer-time, esteemed almost as luxuries, and given as *cadeaux* of some price by lovers to their ladies and their friends. But here—here on the verge of tropical vegetation—the air in the lofty saloons, with their large ever-open windows, was literally impregnated with the odours of a thousand blossoms; and Zoe, indulging in the *dolce far niente* of that enervating climate, drank in the pleasant poison with an indolent yet appreciating spirit.

They had been, both Zoe and her mother, at the Opera on the previous night, and were now, after their early *tête-à-tête* dinner—their accustomed hour of three being not an unusual one in the Southern city—enjoying in appearance the *siesta* enjoined by habit; although in neither case did sleep seem likely to come at their command. They were expecting that visits, according to normal custom, would be paid them later in the evening by their male acquaintances, for such late droppings-in were among the habits of a society partaking in its character of so much that is both French and Spanish. To Mrs. Gordon those evenings, spent for the most part amongst polished and agreeable friends, were reckoned as the pleasantest hours of the day. It was very seldom that any of the few ladies with whom she was acquainted arrived to share in those animated and social gatherings; but this was a privation very little regretted by the lady of the house, to whom the presence of the women of her

class was always a harrowing reminder of the great painful fact of her own worse-than-wasted life.

The two, mother and daughter, were reposing in a half-recumbent position; the one in a *chaise longue*, and the other on a large low ottoman, the soft cushions, or rather mattress, of which was removed but a few inches from the ground, and was covered with a loose drapery of amber-coloured damask.

A very large and powerful dog, half-mastiff and half-bloodhound, lay at his full-length at the young girl's feet. His huge head was within reach of the hand that hung listlessly from the couch, and with it she was unconsciously smoothing the long-pendent ears, abandoned by the sleeping animal to the caresses of his mistress.

'*Mama mia,*' she said, softly; for the sudden coming-on of darkness, in a latitude where twilight is almost an unknown blessing, caused her to see her mother's form but

indistinctly, and the girl feared to rouse her from a fitful slumber—' *mama mia*, is not the dew falling? You should come farther from that window, dear. Remember, Dr. Lane said that the evening dews were dangerous.'

She rose as she spoke, and was preparing to close the *jalousies*, when Mrs. Gordon stopped her.

'Not yet, my darling; the night is warm, and wonderfully beautiful. Sit near me, dear one, and see the darkness stealing swiftly on, and one by one the fire-flies coming out to sport in the still night.'

Zoe stood for a moment by the side of the door-window, inhaling the rich perfume drawn by the night-air from the flowers. Her dress was all of white, with a fresh spray of the beautiful Cherokee-rose in her hair, matched by another bouquet of the same sweet blossoms resting on the bosom, whose beauty the thin muslin of her dress covered, but could not conceal. As she

stood there gazing out upon the night, her heart, although she knew not why, felt heavy within her, and a sigh she strove in vain to arrest passed from between her parted lips.

She turned from the window, hoping that the slight sound had escaped the watchful ears of love; and, throwing herself gently down beside her mother, said, with an attempt at cheerfulness,

‘I wonder, *madre mia*, whether there are many gay balls and *soirées* in the New Orleans world to-night. Two I have heard of—Mrs. Carroll’s and the Spanish consul’s. Two balls upon one night, and dancing till the morning! It was Mr. Morse described it all to me, and said—Mother, he said—that Charles—that Mr. Seymour would be waltzing all the night with every pretty girl he met there; while I, Mother, it seems a little hard that I who would so dearly love to dance, have never yet been to a single ball—not to one single ball,’ she repeated slowly, and as if desirous to impress the

proper sense of her great wrong both on her mother and herself.

‘My poor child,’ Mrs. Gordon said caressingly, ‘you must not long for pleasures far beyond your reach—and doubtful pleasures, too, believe me; for in the balls you think you would enjoy so greatly, there are, if we may credit the experienced ones, many heart-burnings to endure—with much of envy, malice, and uncharitableness. Besides, you would meet there—should my little Cinderella be suddenly gifted with a kind fairy-godmother—that man whom, of all others that I ever saw, I most detest—I mean that odious, vulgar, fawning Mr. Morse.’

‘He’s very vulgar, certainly; but still he doesn’t seem ashamed, as—as others are, to come and talk to us. He was the only one last night who came into our box, and—’

‘Remained most carefully, as you might have noticed, at the back, and in the shade, where he trusted nobody would notice him; or that, if they did, why—what would follow?’

a joke—a vulgar, ribald jest—at the expense of you, my child—of you, the fairest, proudest girl in all this vicious city. Ah, Zoe, darling! would that, without staining with the breath of worldly knowledge the purity I so dearly prize, I could, by putting you on your guard against the snares that will be laid for you, give you some chance of safety.'

'What snares? what dangers? Mother, speak boldly out! I am not quite a child, and something warns me that the time may shortly come, when I must be my own protector. You see a secret enemy in this Northern gentleman—*gentleman*, did I say? Well, I suppose that we must call him so—for he is rich, very rich, they say—and to-night he talked to me of splendours, such as I could hardly have conceived before existed.'

Mrs. Gordon was silent—thinking, it might be, of her young daughter's words.

'Mother,' said Zoe anxiously, and yet with a half-scornful smile upon her lips, 'mother,

you cannot truly fear the machinations of a man like that? A man without a single grace or attraction—a man so soulless, and, I am sure, so heartless—a man who has not—would not dare to breathe a word to me of—oh! *mama mia!* it is too absurd, *that* Mr. Morse, a lover! and mine, too, of all the girls upon the earth! mine! it makes me laugh to think of it!’ And the subdued silvery peal rang out, but met with no responsive echo from the mother, who saw no cause for merriment in the love of such a man as John L. Morse.

The pleasant sound, although there was a tinge of bitterness in its ringing tones, was scarcely hushed, when Cæsar’s entrance, bearing wax lights in massive silver candlesticks, proclaimed the arrival of a visitor.

‘Dar be massa Seymour,’ he announced, with the dignity of his important office in the household, and then stepping back, with a low bow and a scrape backwards, which brought his woolly head in contact with a

beautiful marble copy of Power's '*Slave Girl*, the faithful domestic wriggled himself back with true negro grace into the entrance hall.'

Another moment, and Charley Seymour, in the unexceptionable evening costume which, in deference to the presence of ladies, he invariably wore when making evening calls at his friend Gordon's house — Charley Seymour, Opera hat in hand, and wearing—it was one of the small male coqueties appreciated by that foolish Zoe—Parisian gloves, of unstained white, was bowing gracefully over the taper fingers of his hostess. To her he was always especially courteous and attentive—so courteous and attentive—that it required far more than her usual amount of watchfulness to guard her heart against the approaches of one whom her mother's instinct had already denounced to her as an enemy.

Seymour's unexpected visit threw Zoe, for a few moments, into speechless agitation. For many preceding hours she had been thinking of him with an amount of wrathful-

ness not unmingled with jealousy, which had bid fair—at least, the poor girl thought so in her ignorance—to create a gulf impassable between her and her lover.

During the hours when, whilst apparently listening to the fascinating music of Flotoff's 'Marta,' she had in reality been fixing her eyes in agony of spirit on a beautiful young creole lady, to whom Charles Seymour was evidently devoting himself—during those hours—she had sworn to herself that she would chase his image from her heart, and that never again—no—never while she lived, would she admit him to the dangerous intimacy which had hitherto existed between them.

That at the moment when she registered that vow, Zoe hated with wild intensity the man whose neglect of her in public, and whose seeming worship for another, called her passion forth—no one who understands the nature of a Southern woman's love, can doubt. Pride, jealousy, and wounded tender-

ness met together, and made wild tumult in her breast ; while, before her, throughout the weary day, there had risen the vision of the coming ball—the ball from which the stigma of her race excluded her—the ball where that fair woman with the costly jewels on her snow-white neck and arms, would rest her delicate hand upon his shoulder, and he looking with the soft voluptuous gaze she knew and loved so well—into that woman's tender eyes—would tell her both by words and touch that he adored her.

But with a heart so heavy, why had she laughed so lightly when the image of that repulsive Yankee rose before her as an aspirant for her favour? Why, indeed? but because of all strange earthly contradictions, women are still the strangest, and because so off its balance was, at that perilous time, the guiding reason of the impetuous girl, that in the love of John L. Morse she saw the means towards an end, and that end was—revenge on Charley Seymour.

Only one short moment before the entrance of the man against whose peace she meditated such fatal projects, Zoe had mentally resolved to greet him, when they should meet again, with coldest courtesy. With head erect (and the Southern maiden could, on an emergency, look prouder than a queen) —with head erect, she would hold out to him her hand so coldly, that, even if he dared to touch it, no pressure (oh, how in times gone by for ever, she had loved the lingering hold of those strong fingers) could follow on that grandly distant greeting.

All this the girl had planned and plotted; indeed, she had gone so far as, before her looking-glass, to rehearse her queenly part, looking with some approval at the proud cold beauty in white sweeping robes with sweet blushing flowers—they were no gifts of his—upon her heaving bosom. An hour ago—only one short, fleeting hour, and such was Zoe's purpose! An hour ago, and now—alas, for the stability of that weak thing called

woman!—she sat in the dim light of those two distant candles, with Charley Seymour lounging at her feet upon the low divan, while she looked down upon him with her dove-like eyes—eyes, from which had faded every trace of anger and of hate — eyes, which to look into was to rouse that dangerous glance—half languor and half fire—that Charley Seymour felt, and truly felt, was doomed, for good or ill, to be his fate.

CHAPTER VI.

‘The angels sang in heaven when she was born !
She is a precious jewel I have found
Among the filth and rubbish of the world.
I’ll stoop for it.’

THEY talked, as they might have done in European cities, about the Opera, the music, and the company, while Seymour never once alluded (for which reticence Zoe scarce knew whether to be pleased or sorry) to his absence from the box they had occupied.

He spoke of the fair beauty by whose side he had remained, in quiet terms of admiration, by which composure on his part Zoe was consoled. She did not know as yet what perfect actors practice can make men, as well as women, and thought that if he loved that lovely creole, he must have shown some sign—some bating of the breath, betraying the rapid quickening of his every pulse.

‘And you—’ Seymour asked of her at length, while looking at her fixedly—‘you—I could perceive—for the tall Yankee cannot well be hid under a bushel—were not dependent entirely on the Opera for amusement. By heavens, I meet that dollar’d fellow everywhere! How women can honour by their notice such a brute as that! A brute, too, of whom they can know nothing—a fellow whom, because he spends his money freely, they grow intimate with, and admit into their boudoirs and their Opera boxes.’

‘He is no friend of ours,’ Zoe murmured, half alarmed by his vehemence, ‘at least, not of mamma’s and mine. My father seems to know him well. He brings him here, and tells us to be civil to him. It is very hard, he is so vulgar and disagreeable. The first Yankee I have seen, too, and I can well understand now the prejudices which are entertained against the Northerners in Europe.’

‘I do not look upon them as countrymen

of my own,' said Seymour, addressing Mrs. Gordon, who, half alarmed by the low tones in which the conversation was carried on, had drawn nearer to her daughter's chair. 'I do not look upon the Yankees as countrymen of my own; but at the same time it would be unjust to take the ignorant upstart we are talking of as even an average specimen of a Northern gentleman. I have met, not only with capital fellows, but with great refinement, both of mind and manner, in the North. I am not sure, however, that in Europe—take them *en masse*—they show to the best advantage.'

'And why?' asked Mrs. Gordon.

'Partly, I think, from their attempts to acquire a kind of spurious polish which sits ill upon them; and partly from the disappointment they must frequently feel at the want of success on the part of the ladies they take about with them.'

'But surely they are not unrefined; and as for beauty, I have heard that the Northern

American ladies can vie in loveliness even with those of England itself.'

'In physical beauty—yes—and also in education—for the Northern "females"—what a detestable word it is!—are generally blue to their fingers' ends. But like the men, they see everything in a business point of view. Their very coquetries are a kind of commercial transaction. Life has for them literally no poetry, and there is no place for imagination in natures which education and example have hardened into dollar-loving alone.'

'How strange,' exclaimed Zoe, 'but surely there must be exceptions to this rule—for a whole people—the women, especially, cannot be so unnatural—I mean so—'

'You mean what you have said—unnatural'—interrupted Seymour. 'But it is an anomaly brought about by the mercantile habits of a progress-admiring go-a-head race. The Northern men have neither leisure to make love nor to play the amiable. Money

is not to be made by lying at the feet of beauty, nor by paying pretty compliments to a sex, every member of which either has been or is waiting, with open eyes and ears, for the opportunity of doing a little business on her own account, and securing the husband to whom (to do them only justice) they are generally faithful unto death.'

Mrs. Gordon was about to answer this critique on the fair daughters of the North, when Mr. Gordon, accompanied by Davenport Seymour, came, unannounced, into the room.

The latter, who had not been more than a few hours in the city, after a passing visit to his father's plantation, greeted Charley joyfully.

'Glad to catch you anywhere,' he said, 'for truly you are the most loafing and roaming of mortals. I made up my brotherly mind that you would be stationary for a while, and now I hear that you have been wandering away from us again!'

'Yes,' rejoined Gordon, 'and of all places in the world—to the swampy islands in the Gulf; and for what, I wonder—come—give an account of your proceedings in the dismal Delta, and confess what was your attraction to those watery and pestilential wilds.'

'Love of information regarding his country, let us hope,' said Davenport, laughing. 'Come, come, it will not do, perhaps, to question him too closely, Gordon; and as for the attraction—'

'I had a very legitimate one, as you will allow when I tell you that I had some thoughts of becoming the purchaser of a small estate in those diggings, and have not even yet given up the idea of doing so.'

'And did you really travel into those desert countries?' Zoe asked. 'How often, I have thought that I should like to visit real wild countries such as those; and what pleasure it would be to live where untamed creatures roam about the unpeopled prairies, where the uncountable buffaloes make the

earth tremble beneath their feet, and where—'

Charles Seymour broke in upon her enthusiasm with a laugh.

'You have formed,' he said, 'rather an erroneous idea of the description of country through which run the main branches of the Mississippi, nor would I advise you or any lady, however adventurous, to attempt a tour through those watery districts.'

'Did you have good weather for your expedition?' Mrs. Gordon asked.

'Beautiful. It was just after the disappearance of the snow, and I had an idea, in which, however, I was disappointed, that I should see the opening spring to better advantage if I roamed towards the Gulf; so I set off with that capital fellow, Benjy Hudfield for my companion, and anything but "considerable plunder" for my use upon the road.'

'But,' demanded Davenport, 'we who have never been in those parts would be glad to

know how you went, and what you saw upon your journey.'

'Well, I went in the very smallest of undecked steamboats, and saw very little of any kind to reward me for running the risk of catching a fever in those dreary wilds.'

'Unwholesome enough, I dare say,' said Gordon; 'and to me it is a mystery how you escaped scotfree from such a suicidal expedition. It all comes, however, of having been in England. It is so like our British cousins, to want to see everything, especially if there chance to be either risk or eccentricity in the attempt.'

'I don't know about the risk, and desire of singularity I utterly disclaim. I own, however, to having had some faint design upon a certain island which, as I before told you, I had seen advertised for sale.'

'And which I hope you have not been insane enough to become the purchaser of,' suggested his brother.

'That is my secret,' responded Charley,

with a smile. 'But, as far as a faint sketch of our expedition goes, I will bore you with five minutes of narrative:—Passing over, however, quickly the early portion of our voyage, the character of our magnificently-frightful river being too well known to need description; after a time, however, we turned into narrower paths—if you will let me call them so—paths of dull, slimy water, with reedy banks redolent of fever, on which the grey, noisome alligators came forth to warm themselves in the noon-day sun. How our helmsman found his way amidst that labyrinth of aquatic roads was often a mystery to us; so great was the similitude of the intersecting watery lanes, lined on either side by tall marsh-plants, in which the hideous bullfrogs croaked their weary song incessantly, while myriads of the web-footed tribe flew past and over us, whenever the crack of our rifles at the sleeping alligators roused them from the sheltering reeds. Two days of journeying through this unwholesome waste of

waters brought us to a place where we expected to exchange our mode of conveyance for the waggon which Dillon had promised should be in waiting for us. We had landed, strange to say, on solid ground, and from a narrow creek, over which long branches of ancient live oaks almost interlaced themselves, and the thick fleshy leaves of the magnolia-tree mingled, in beautiful contrast of colouring, with the grey, drooping moss, that vegetable rust which marks, as we all know, every branch of our fine forest-trees. The turf felt fresh and soft beneath our feet, and was dotted with small and many-coloured flowers. Very pleasant was it; and as evening came on, no doubt very deadly to dare the dews beneath those primeval trees, from which festoons of large-leaved creepers hung and entwined themselves in almost imperious masses of verdure.'

'How beautiful it must have been,' said Zoe; 'and were there birds, and deer, and other wild creatures, to be seen around?'

‘Plenty, I believe, if we had looked for them. And as to mocking-birds, it seemed to be their head-quarters. I saw a flying squirrel, too, Miss Gordon, who would have ensnared your affections at a glance.’

He rose from his chair as he spoke, and, leaning over Zoe, asked her rather abruptly to sing to him.

She complied at once, he following her to the instrument, and listening with silent rapture to her glorious voice, as she sung melody after melody of those soul-stirring strains which the lovers of German music find so irresistibly attractive. She had finished Schubert's ‘Adieu,’ and the last soft farewell word was vibrating on the air, when looking round him, Seymour noticed, not only that the other inhabitants of the room were engaged in what appeared to be deeply-interesting conversation, but that Mrs. Gordon's chair was empty.

Through the widely-opened windows the soft moonlight—almost tropical in its bright-

ness—was beginning to shimmer through the purple blossoms of the Pride of India trees; and while it lighted up into gem-like brilliancy the ruby-hued camellias, it traced a delicate shadowing of tender branches on the velvet lawn.

‘Come out with me into the moonlight,’ Seymour whispered, his low voice being drowned by louder tongues; ‘come with me, Zoe, for the fire-flies are all abroad, and you must dim their lustre with the light of your bright eyes.’

She did not hesitate a moment, but obeying, as if mechanically, those soft imperious tones, followed him as he went forth amongst the trees into the silvery stillness of the night.

CHAPTER VII.

‘ Through thick and thin, both over bank and brook,
In hope to attain her by hook or by crook.’

IN a small one-storied house in the outskirts of the city—a wooden house, with dilapidated shingle-roof, and bearing a general aspect of decay and poverty, a coloured woman was sitting alone—and almost in darkness. The night had closed in—it was the one succeeding that which had been passed by Chérie, more in suffering than amusement at the well-filled Opera-house; and the woman who sat in that desolate hut, for it was scarcely more—was none other than the waiting-woman, Angélique.

She seemed in a very restless and excited mood—rising frequently from her low wooden chair to pace the narrow limits of the room, or, shading her eyes from the light within, to

peer out through the curtained, but unglazed window, into the still and as yet moonless night.

‘He’ll nebber come, the villain,’ she muttered to herself; ‘and yet he says he wants me to help him take away Miss Zoe. To tink now that she nebber guessed it was the Yankee brute that took her almost in his airms that day! To tink dat massa Seymour nebber knew about de knife. To tink dis chile got hold of it and kep it. It’s got Link Morse’s name upon it too; and if he thought that Angy had it always—always safe about her—he’d jez rail a few, I reckon. And—’

But here her silent soliloquy was cut short by the stealthy arrival of the gentleman in question; for, almost before she had been aware of his approach, the figure of the tall Yankee, with a broad-brimmed Palmetto hat upon his head, and with a light cloak flung over his slouching shoulders, stood before her.

'Well now, what's your news, my pretty snowball?' was his courteous address. 'What news of the young lady? Any love-letters between them yet? Has that cusst young sugar-grinder given you a dollar yet, my girl? I say if you play any of your scurvy tricks, young woman, I'll wring that yellow throat of yours, as sure as my name's John Link Morse.'

The woman, who had risen on his entrance, shot a glance at him from her dark eyes, which was anything but flattering to its object.

'You're a purty gen'l'man, but it's like yer sort to speak dat way to a young woman. But you'll please remember, sare, ye're not in countries where a coloured girl's of no account. My massa he not take a thousand dollars for dis chile. You jez lay a hand on me, dat's all.' And Angy in the pride of her worth strutted past her insulter with an air of ludicrous importance.

Morse was not easily moved to merriment,

or he could not have looked gravely on at Angy's antics; as it was, however, only the shadow of a smile flitted across his repulsive face, as he said—

‘Hulloh, darkey, here’s a pretty go; proud are we? Never mind; I wouldn’t touch you with a pair of tongs, you dirty nigger, you.’

‘You’d touch Miss Zoe, though, I guess, on’y she’d nebber let you. She’s meat for dat chile’s massa;’ and she pointed her yellow finger at the irritated man, ‘one wid her now walking in de moonlight, under the big trees in Massa Gordon’s garden.’

‘D——n!’ shouted the Yankee, whom for some reason best known to herself, Angélique was endeavouring to work up to the highest pitch of exasperation. ‘D——n! what is it that you mean; you b——d fool? Speak out—the darned young Southerner is there, and you’ve been keeping it a secret, have you?’

'He berry often dare is Massa Seymour,' said Angy, with provoking coolness; 'he come whisper, whisper, whisper, in pretty lily ear, and then Miss Zoe—don't she lub to hear him? Don't she jez get as red as de rose in June; an' she say, dis way—"Mister Seymour, don't now if yer a rale gen'l'man, don't now; it makes me feel ugly," and den Miss Zoe smile, and blush, and look at 'im like dis.'

To see Angy suiting the action to the word, smiling, simpering, and drawing up her well-formed dusky figure, was a sight most ludicrous to witness. It stirred Link's angry passion mightily, and he was about to do even more perhaps than threaten the woman who so rashly raised him into wrath, when a sudden thought struck him, and recovering himself by a strong effort of his will, he said calmly enough—

'Well, we must find a way to stop their love-making; in the meantime there are two things I want to hear about. First—the

knife. You said you saw a negro fellow pick it up. Now it's my belief you know exactly who's the thief; and if you don't speak out, darn it, but you'll be made to—yes, by h—you will.'

'Whoever's got it knows what 'twas you used it for,' said Angy, sullenly.

'Does he? Well, then, he'd better keep his knowledge to himself; and, as for you, you smut—but that's all nonsense—I'll give you what I said I would—ten dollars if you produce the bowie-knife, and ten more besides to tell me something worth the knowing about Lawyer Mace and Zoe Gordon's father.

He drew his chair still nearer to the woman's as he spoke—striving by all means, by threats as well as promises, to extract from her the information he desired. Nor did he altogether fail in his attempts, for before the interview was ended, the Yankee was in possession of information connected with Mr. Gordon's pecuniary affairs which

gave him good hopes of success in a quarter where a man less sanguine than himself would have hitherto perceived only the certainty of failure.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘And who made terror, madness, crime, remorse,
Which from the links of the great chain of things,
To every thought within the mind of man
Sway and drag heavily, and each one reels
Under the load towards the pit of death.’

THE virulence of vindictive feeling felt and displayed by Angy against her mistress will excite little surprise in those who are acquainted, not only with Southern character, but with some of the worst consequences of the Institution of Slavery.

The fact, that the highest condition to which a coloured woman in Louisiana can ever hope to attain is to be the mistress of a white man, is too well known to need comment in these pages. To marry even a free man of their own race is far from being regarded by the generality of those unfortunate beings as a desirable destiny. For by

uniting herself with a mulatto a coloured slave woman confirms, or perhaps even lowers, her position, while as the unmarried companion of a white man she conceives herself to be immeasurably exalted in the scale of society.

About twelvemonths before this period there had been a question of wedding Angy to a blacksmith on the estate. This alliance the girl had indignantly refused; for the idea she entertained of the importance attached to her by Mr. Gordon's notice was too exalted to admit of such *encanaillage*. The woman's nature also, besides being passionate, was ambitious and aspiring. For years she had eagerly watched the gradual decline of Madam Gordon's health, in the hope that, having refused to bind herself by matrimonial ties, a death vacancy at head-quarters might occur, which would open wide the door to her own great and permanent advancement. She hoped and wished, while still the fair frail woman

lingered on—lingered in silks and satins, while she, whom Angy deemed could show as good a claim to the distinction she coveted, wore only showy Europe cottons, with, for her Sunday finery, a gaudy many-coloured shawl of silk or gauze. But there was yet another cause for the extra amount of concealed remorse rankling in the slave-woman's breast, and this cause was no other than that more than three years had elapsed since she had had an opportunity of visiting the city, the gay and dissipated place where the Quadroon balls were held, those balls where not a single man of coloured blood dare show his face, while the white 'gen'l'men' parade the rooms to choose fresh victims to their often almost momentary passion.

The only redeeming trait in a character hardened by a life of vice was the deep love which Angy nourished for her child; and that one link to virtue severed, she drifted out upon the stormy waves of sin, a lost and guilty soul. A craving after the

privileges enjoyed by Clarice and her daughter was, as we have seen, the parent in the wretched creature's mind, of every other evil. She had been always envious of the mother's influence and authority, but that ignoble feeling was almost eclipsed by the strange covetousness with which she looked on Zoe's matchless beauty. With such charms as those, the slave woman believed, and not unreasonably, that Madam Gordon's daughter might choose a mate, amongst the richest magnates of the land. And for this cause chiefly did she hate her, hate her even before the loss of her young son had turned her mother's blood to gall; nor could the feeling of detestation have been easily increased, save for the appearance on the scene of Charley Seymour, the sight of whose manly beauty, and the knowledge of his worth, aggravated the dark disease of diabolical hatred which made a hell of the slave woman's breast.

The reader may possibly remember that

on the occasion of Seymour's first visit to the Gordons, Angélique, in virtue of her office as waiting-maid (that office, by the way, which initiates a quick-witted *soubrette* into so many mysteries besides those strictly appertaining to outward adornment), had seen in the glass, and anything but darkly, a revelation of feelings, which the unworld-taught girl, by whom they were displayed, scarcely attempted to conceal. With her hands busily employed in braiding her young mistress's shining tresses, Angy inwardly resolved to see with her own eyes the gentleman whose name had power to call up those vivid blushes; and impelled to the act by motives in which, woman though she was, simple curiosity formed but a small component part, the mulatto contrived, by slightly drawing aside a heavy *portière* at the extremity of the reception-room, to be a hidden witness of the meeting between Zoe and her admirer. The amount of mischief worked by the spirit of evil during that one

short moment passes the power of calculation. The woman's wits were keen and penetrating, and it required but an instant's searching of those wicked eyes to learn the truth, namely, that it was Charley Seymour's purpose to make that lovely girl his own at every cost and hazard.

In countries where illicit connections such as that meditated by Seymour entail upon their victims the award of misery and disgrace, to let things take their natural course might have been considered by a revengeful woman as a sure and certain means of entailing hopeless ruin on the object of her hate; but with Angy's tastes, sentiments, and convictions, vengeance took another turn, and to cross poor Zoe's obvious love for one so handsome, rich, and gallant, grew from that moment to be the settled purpose of her life.

She saw them meet—Zoe with a tinge of colour in her cream-white cheek, like a soft opening rosebud, and he with a frank, joyous

smile—a hand stretched out, and with a noble, manly bearing that made the coloured woman clench her hands in longing and in wrath.

‘She nebbur hab him. He too handsome for dem kine a people; I said I’d fix that swell-head yaller gal; tain’t easy, but I’ll do it.’ And with this mental expression of her resolution she hurried from her place of concealment. Angélique, who was fully alive to the expedience of uniting pleasure with business, had obtained a few hours’ leave of absence from her indulgent mistress; and after decking herself in her gayest finery (but without the thin gauze veil she coveted; for the wearing of that article of adornment is forbidden by the law) she proceeded with a rapid step along the streets, keeping ever within view the figures of the three equestrians whose footsteps she had followed from her master’s door.

It was a difficult task to remain (as she had hoped to do) almost within ear-shot of the pair whose looks and whispered words

might have betrayed them even to a chance observer, as the lovers they so nearly were. But yet, and almost insurmountable as she found the obstacles in her way, womanly perseverance bore down all before her, and by dint of pushing, struggling, and above all, *wriggling* in true negro fashion, Angy elbowed her way through the crowd, and was within a stone's throw of the scene, when Morse, under cover of his hideous disguise, dared to lay a profaning hand upon the dress of Zoe Gordon.

The scene, which in another chapter it took some pages to relate, passed in the twinkling of an eye before the face of the coloured woman. She saw the insult, then the heavy blow struck by the stalwart Southern gentleman, and finally the upraised knife aimed by a coward's hand, and only hindered as by a miracle from sheathing itself hilt-deep in the breast of the unarmed man.

For a few seconds the surging crowd had the effect of separating the determined woman

from those whose fortunes she was bent on following. For a few seconds only, and then the vast human tide swept on, leaving her standing there alone—alone indeed, but still not unrewarded for her exertions, for in her hand she held a bowie knife with long, well-sharpened blade, on which was distinctly engraved, in full, the name of John Lincoln Morse.

From that moment—how it boots not now to tell—Angy had become, what Morse, in his simple masculine cunning, termed his tool and instrument; that she had purposes of her own to follow, never once occurred to him, nor had, as yet, the suspicion arisen within him that she was in actual possession of the knife, which would, in case of Seymour's suspicions being aroused, prove a mute but dangerous witness against him.

Angy's own evidence in a court of law—she being a slave—would, to use his own words, be of no manner of account, but still the knife, seen as it was by many when turned

against Charles Seymour, might (as the speculator feared), if he were known to have been discovered near the spot, be made a means of shaking to its foundation the hold, slight and precarious though it was, which he had contrived to obtain on public opinion.

So the male villain plotted and temporized with the vicious female spy, and all the while, Chérie, the unconscious object of their treacherous machinations, pursued her radiant path—lighted by the brightest of all dazzling planets—*id est*, the Star of Love, shining in a summer sky, in which no cloud had yet arisen to warn her of the coming tempest.

CHAPTER IX.

‘Thronging shadows fast and thick
Fall on *her* overflowing eyes ;
Her heart is quivering like a flame,
As morning dew that in the sunbeam dies,
She is *dissolved* by those consuming ecstasies.’

THERE is a season of life—who is there so heavily visited by fortune’s frowns that he will not echo the assertion?—There is a season in life when the power of enjoyment, and the will to seize on every passing pleasure, are so intense that like the sun’s rays lapping up the traces of a gone-by storm, it wipes away the April tears—tears which pass as swiftly as a summer’s shower, causing the opening smiles to shine more brightly for the momentary gloom.

Chérie had shed many a tear in secret over her mother’s failing health. She had felt with terrible bitterness the pang of an anticipated separation from the only one whose

love she knew would never fail her; but hope, the allegro song, to which a fresh young spirit dances in its exuberance of health and life, broke out in brilliant melody around her; while the force of daily habit, steady, strong, and sure, shed a softening veil over an evil which might, by God's blessing, and her own exceeding care, be long averted from that loving daughter's head.

During the weeks which had elapsed previous to the Gordons' removal to New Orleans, Zoe had indulged freely in a pleasure hitherto unknown to her. She had read largely of works of fiction, and had—the case is a very common one—identified herself with the dangerous creations of an author's teaming brain; placing herself, in imagination, in situations of difficulty and peril, and coining for her own behoof a hero, combining in his own person the collective merits of all the Henrys and Arthurs, the Oswalds and the Guys, whom she by turns regarded as models of perfection.

Can it be wondered at, that with her youthful fancy thus filled to overflowing with such ideal images, Zoe should see in one endowed with personal beauty, mental gifts, and above all, with that knowledge of the world which in itself is power, the realization of her fondest day-dreams? Nor can we venture to throw blame upon one who, from the (in some sort) isolation of her life, had little opportunity of drawing comparisons by which her judgment might have been assisted, and the rushing flight of her eager imagination curbed. The forethought which, by making them, as it were, *au fait* of the perils that surround them, is the great protection of young American girls, was entirely overlooked in the case of Zoe Gordon. But if she were deficient in the knowledge which makes young women prudent, she had at least preserved the inestimable charms of *naïveté* and innocence—charms that in her lover's eyes far more than counterbalanced her deficiencies in that art so well under-

stood by America's self-protecting daughters, *videlicet*, the art of coquetry.

A week—a short happy week—had elapsed since the night when Zoe enjoyed, with her lover, that blissful *tête-à-tête*, which, only to remember, was to the ardent Southern maiden a foretaste of the paradise of her dreams; and although, after that never-to-be-forgotten hour, their meetings had been, from the fact of others' presence, less absolutely delightful, yet opportunities had been found for words and looks teeming with thoughts untold—words from the well-practised lips of Charley Seymour, containing meaning for one ear only, and looks whose every searching glance was a caress!

At last they were alone. The one—the feeble helpless one—standing with scarce a thought on the extremest verge of the fathomless abyss, and he, in whose forbearance seemed to lie her only chance of safety, watching with relentless eagerness the moment for the hazardous venture.

Quite alone they were in that luxurious room, where breathed around an atmosphere of voluptuousness—the scent of fresh spring flowers, and the songs of mating birds. For that careful, anxious mother, to whom the safety of her child was precious as the breath of heaven, was (most rare circumstance) absent from her post. A favourite slave, old Judith, Zoe's nurse in days gone by, was dying—dying in a small hut, a kind of low negro lodging-house, the same in which Angélique had met her scheming fellow-conspirator on the night when the first words of love were spoken, that were destined to remain (in one heart at least) engraven on the memory for ever.

Judith, whose health had long been declining, had obtained permission, by means of Mr. Gordon's overseer, to come 'down river,' in order to see a daughter, from whom she had long been parted, and whom she pined to see again before 'de great Jehovah called her to de 'appy land'—the land where,

in the words of her own well-loved Methodist hymn—

‘She saw the band of spirits bright,
That taste the glories there ;
They all are robed in spotless white,
And conquering palms they bear.’

The aged negress, impressed with the conviction that her days were numbered, had despatched an urgent message to the ‘missus,’ entreating her to come to the shingle-roofed hut, where the poor old creature lay. A dismal death-bed truly was it — differing strangely in its adjuncts from those of her neat plantation-home, where, for by far the better part of a century, the attached old negress had abided, rearing sons and daughters for her owner’s service, and watching, in her later days of well-contented idleness, the gambols of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren around her cabin-door.

‘Mamma is out,’ were Zoe’s first words after Seymour’s long pressure of her hand had made her heart beat quickly, and her

breath grow short. 'She will not be long, I hope—she has gone to see our poor old Judith die, we fear; and when she left, she promised not to be an hour away.'

Not an hour. Only one short hour to have her there beside him—to plead his cause with all a lover's eagerness—to pour into her ear his vows of endless constancy, and read his answer in her passionate eyes. He had no time to waste in small conventionalities, or in preludes—slow and soft to the heart-stirring music of the passions' song; so he spoke out at once, with a low, thrilling voice, that found its way, insidious as the poison of the upas-tree, into the very life-blood of the listener.

'We are alone then, Zoe—alone at last—with no one near to hear our whispers—no one to come between us and our love, my dear one; for you do love me, Zoe? You do not answer—not a word! It cannot be that I have read your heart amiss! You have not murmured many hopes to me, my

own loved one—but what are words, when looks can speak like yours?’

She was very near him, standing in a drooping attitude—(her country’s wondrous statuary might have caught it gladly for a sculptured ‘passions’ slave’)—and with her fair head lowered on her quickly-heaving breast.

Emboldened by this eloquent silence, he drew her gently nearer to him, passing his left arm round her pliant form. The other held her small imprisoned hand, and pressed it with wild fervour to his burning lips.

Poor Zoe! Poor young untaught child! Untaught, indeed, in all that should have warned her of the great, undreamt-of danger—the danger of the first, worst step, that never (in instances whose name is Legion) can be retraced. She had but stood a moment there, with that man’s eyes upon her own, and yet her heart was bounding wildly under the firm pressure of his hand; for very closely Seymour held her there—

so closely that Zoe grew afraid—afraid of him, and of the nameless tumult warring fiercely in her breast; and yet she never strove to free herself, but only clung the closer, as to one who could and would protect her, even from the weakness of her own frail nature.

‘My darling,’ he whispered between the kisses, which, made bolder by impunity, he pressed upon her pallid lips; ‘my darling, my own dark-eyed love, we have a life of joy before us—of joy you have not dreamt of—away from this bad, heartless place, my Chérie—away from cruel, slandering tongues. Come, lift those glorious eyes to mine, and say the words *Je t’aime*. Say it in the language that we love, my Chérie; for you are not from the black and bitter North, my angel, but a daughter of the glorious sun, with Southern passion coursing through your veins. Ah! speak to me, my sweet, one word of love—one whisper of a promise to be mine.’

She raised her queenly head—the fair face colourless as marble—and fixing on him those speaking, languid eyes, kindling with rays that fairly dazzled him, the sweet lips opened as if about to breathe the vow he prayed for, when a step, grinding with heavy footfall on the gravel before the house, arrested the unspoken words; and Zoe, trembling and affrighted, wrenched herself from her lover's embrace, and made her escape from a scene in which other actors were about to make their unexpected, and, by one at least, their most unwished-for, appearance.

CHAPTER X.

‘The best-laid schemes of mice and men
Gang aft a-gley;
An’ lea’e us nought but grief and pain
For promised joy.’

THE first impulse of Charley Seymour—and he followed it without a moment’s reflection or delay—was to throw himself into the nearest chair, and taking up the latest number of the ‘Picayune,’ pretend to be deeply interested in its contents.

An instant after—for the danger of discovery had been imminent—a tall shadow fell across the floor, and the ungainly form of John L. Morse stood on the threshold of the wide glass door that opened on to the verandah.

A few weeks’ residence in the South, and a free indulgence in the habits engendered by a thirsty climate, had by no means tended to

improve the personal appearance of Mr. John Lincoln Morse. A more cadaverous and livid appearance had spread itself over his lank, unwholesome-looking features. In his light-grey eyes a perpetual catarrh seemed raging, while his long and unkempt locks bore evidence to the habitual disregard of personal appearance which had ever been characteristic of the scheming Yankee.

He entered the room with his head covered by the inevitable broad-brimmed palmetto hat, and his ungainly person clothed in linen of a doubtful white.

'I say, squire,' he said, addressing Seymour for the first time, and with remarkable absence of ceremony—'I say, squire, how d'ye rise? Seems to me you've dropped on us like a catamount on a coon. You're pretty well to hum here, I reckon.'

To this agreeable exordium Seymour vouchsafed no reply, but continued reading his newspaper with what his unwelcome compa-

nion considered a most impertinent assumption of superiority.

‘I say now, that’s an uncommon fine girl for a nigger, that by-blow of Gordon’s. Straight back, clean pasterns—eyes that look you through and through. D—n me, but they’re what I *call* eyes, some—they are!’

The Yankee had rightly guessed that the mention of Zoe Gordon would be, of all means that he could try, the most likely to rouse Charles Seymour from his apathy. But while rashly stirring up the slumbering lion, Morse had not calculated on the full consequences of his rashness; nor was he prepared for the sudden burst of concentrated anger which assailed him from those quivering lips, white with the passion that tugged fiercely at his heart.

‘Sir,’ he said, with an effort at self-restraint that did him credit, ‘if the hour were later, I should conclude from your conduct that you had already taken rather more than your accustomed number of drams at some

low whisky store; but it being yet scarcely noon, I am afraid that your bad manners are chronic, and therefore require severe remedies in order to effect a cure. May I request that you will remove yourself from this room, where at any moment the ladies of the house may be annoyed and disgusted by your presence.'

During the delivery of this speech, which was uttered with provoking calmness, Seymour was lounging in the most negligent of attitudes in a rocking-chair, with Zoe's favourite love-bird perched upon his wrist. He kept his eyes upon the Yankee meaningfully—so meaningfully that the blustering speculator began to feel that this was no child's play in which he had engaged; still, he had to a certain extent—and well he knew the fact—the game in his own power; and it was this pleasant consciousness that induced him to preserve what he deemed a high tone while dealing with the Southern gentleman.

'Now, by h—l,' he said, 'that's good. So

you tell me to clar out, do you, with your fine gen'l'man airs and your aristocrat ways from across the herring pond. Now, squire, I tell you this—we'd best skin the *bar* at once, and then I reckon we'll find out which is ham and which is hominy.'

By this time Seymour, who was very little acquainted with the phraseology adopted by rowdy adventurers from the Northern States, began seriously to believe that the man who stood before him, with dusty boots, slouching hat, and manners so utterly unsuited to a lady's boudoir, was in reality under the influence of liquor. With this conviction, and disliking the idea of any further contention with so 'low a brute,' he rose from his chair, with the intention not only of leaving him to his own agreeable company, but of warning Zoe, through the medium of Angélique, that for the present her wisest course would be to remain in the seclusion of her own apartment.

The idea had barely formed itself into a resolution, when the master of the house,

looking hot, cross, and weary, lounged into the room. He was evidently unprepared for the sight of visitors, and seemed half inclined to draw back, in the hope that his silent entrance had been unnoticed; this unhost-like purpose, however, was prevented by Morse, who, without the preliminary ceremony of raising his hat, extended a moist, ungloved hand to the harassed man.

'Morning to you, squire—rayther warm, arnt it? Fixed up slick, I reckon, in that ar loose toggery. I say now, is that the go with the upper eend fellars to York? I arnt been to hum since fall. Expect I must take a spell there soon and see the fashions.'

During the delivery of this speech, Gordon, whose annoyance at the unceremonious tone assumed by his obnoxious guest was difficult to conceal, had moved away to a side table, and with his back turned towards the other occupants of the room, was cooling his plaate, and possibly, his wrath, by a long draught of the iced water standing in its frosted

crystal jug amongst bouquets of fragrant flowers.

Seymour had by this time risen from the high-backed rocking-chair in which he had been ensconced, and feeling that, for some cause unknown to him, his presence there was likely to be undesirable, he took advantage of the habits of familiarity in which he lived with the Gordon family, and sauntered quietly out through the glass door into the garden.

'Well, I guess that ar's a pretty considerable cool hand; one of your quiet coons, and no mistake,' said Morse, taking instant possession of the vacated rocking-chair, and thrusting his hands still deeper into his ample pockets—'Gits along I reckon pretty slick among the gals with his parly-vouing and his bragging; but I say, old 'oss—' and here, taking advantage of a sway backwards of the rocking-chair, which brought him within reach of Gordon's sensitive ribs—'I say,' he continued, touching the latter up with a playful tickle, 'I say, it won't do to

have that young fellar hanging about here ; he'll have to take his goods to another market, I guess. And now, s'pose we two have a friendly jaw about business. 'Taint yesterday as I was born—nor I wasn't like a blind puppy then neither—both eyes open ! That's the ticket ! That's the way to git along ! So now for this here mortgage business. You see—'

But what Mr. Gordon saw—and how he bore the spectacle presented to his view by the man whom for many a day past he had had every reason to consider as the evil genius, sent into the world to be his torment and his bane—is a subject not to be dwelt on here. Suffice it that the interview, which was a long one, was only ended by the return of Mrs. Gordon, who, paler and weaker than she had ever yet appeared in Jaspar's eyes, entered her pretty 'keeping-room,' to find two men with heated, angry faces, confronting one another fiercely. Her appearance checked their vehement tones, but no at-

tempts at concealment could hide the wicked look of triumph gleaming in the small red-rimmed eyes of John L. Morse, or prevent the anxious woman from perceiving at a glance that Jasper Gordon, well as he had fought the wordy fight, and vigorous as had been his resistance, was a worsted man—broken in spirit, and, for aught she knew, at the mercy of an unscrupulous and relentless adversary.

CHAPTER XI.

‘All forms that perish other forms supply,
(By turns we catch the vital breath and die)
Like bubbles on the sea of matter borne,
They rise, they break, and to that sea return.’

IN order to preserve the unity of our story, it is necessary to retrace our steps, even to the moment when Clarice departed on her charitable mission, trusting that through the laws of conventionality and custom (often broken and cast aside, but never wholly disregarded), her child would be safe and happy till her return from the offices of mercy which had been required of her.

On leaving her home, she had directed the coachman to drive to the house, the address of which had been left by old Judith’s messenger ; a very confused and complicated description had the little coloured

boy given of the locality in which that dilapidated dwelling was situated. Sam, however, was not one to be daunted by any difficulties connected with his calling, for he had heard ole Ju' speak scores of times of the place where she was raised.

'B'longed to a rich man once as brought niggers down from Tennessee way to sell in New Orleans—kinder breeding-place, too, it was.' Sam heard—but he was dead and gone years ago—that trader in human flesh, and the house property, had fallen into other hands—the 'convenient premises,' for the purpose to which they had been put, having been sold in small lots to different bidders, so that in reality the coachman was by no means equal to the task of tracking the aged negress to the hut, where, like the hare to its form, she had retired to die.

The carriage was an open one, and Sam, being of a loquacious turn, took every opportunity of enlivening his mistress with the

last accounts of the invalid's condition and symptoms.'

'She berry sick,' he said, turning round upon his seat, with an ominous shake of his pepper-and-salt head. 'She berry sick, is ole Ju'. She shake like hab de fever. You'll find a Sister o' Charity dar, miss. She wash ole Ju's head, and pray all de day beside de bed.'

'Has Angy been to see her?' Mrs. Gordon asked.

'Don't know, 'zactly—tink she hasn't—'pears Angy nebber got no time for noting. Dat dar gal a fust-rater for de dance, and guine out at nights; but I'se reckon she oughtenter forget ole Judith—de old aunty as nussed de lily picaninny berry often in her arms afore he go to de land of Canaan.'

'Poor thing,' thought Clarice, 'she feels the death of her little Freddy still. She cannot bear the sight of one who reminds her of her loss. Perhaps we have been hard on the poor girl, and have not given her time to

visit her child's grave. Illness has made me very selfish—illness and my love for Zoe. God grant I be not punished for my devotion to that only blessing—but there is a dreary aching in my breast, and a strange weight upon my spirits, for which sickness only cannot be sufficient cause.'

Such gloomy thoughts as these oppressed the ailing woman during the comparatively short periods when the sable coachman's voice was hushed, either by lack of breath, or by the necessity for bestowing some trifling amount of attention on the guidance of his steeds.

'Dey beautiful 'osses,' he said, approvingly. 'Dey gran enuff for Queen Victoria on her throne. Look at dis 'ere Bessy, she nebber turn a hair—the beauty. She fit to carry Missy Zoe to de Shell Road, when she gallop dar wid de 'ansome gen'l'man.'

The languid and easily over-excited mistress, with her chattering Jehu, soon discovered that the 'beautiful 'osses,' Bessy and

Belinda, had many a thronged and narrow street to traverse before the lady's pilgrimage of mercy could have an end. Through narrow, over-crowded ways, they went, and along lines of houses—French in aspect—ornamented with balconies, tall, and with faces of discoloured stucco. Many stores they passed, too, on their way, adorned with large glass fronts, but offering little show of tempting goods within.

It was the first time for years that Clarice had passed through that portion of the city. The first time for many a day that she had heard another language than her own gabbled by the mixed-breed population of her birth-place. Very curious and old world, indeed, it seemed to her—taking her back again in thought (is it not often so when human life is tottering on the dark edge of the grave?) to early childhood's days, when rashly wishing that the spring would faster fly, we know not how to wait the summer's flowers and fruits. Impressed, for a whole life, upon that woman's

mind were the first images that her susceptible youth had first received, and retained as if chiselled on a marble slab till death should close her eyes for ever.

How the well-remembered language woke up busy fancy from its slumbers, whispering of the old times gone by—the dear old times of innocence and peace; when evil thoughts and deeds were all unknown, and before (in the crime-stained land that gave her birth)

‘Her *owner* led her from the door,
He led her by the hand,
To be his slave and paramour.’

In a spot distant indeed and how widely differing from that happy convent home, where white-veiled maidens, and nuns with their pure virgin brows bound with snow-white muslin folds, swept along with slow steps and trailing garments the floor of the beautiful chapel of the Couvent des Oiseaux, in the grand old French capital. Again she heard the pealing organ sound to the vaulted roof in prayer and

praise; again the scent of incense rose upon the air, and the voice of the good old priest pronouncing pardon for her small, childish faults thrilled to her poor wounded heart, and left, instead of balm, only an added sting.

She awoke from a reverie, short, but exquisitely painful, to find herself, greatly to her surprise, in the old Place d'Armes, with the heavy scent of flowers from the well-kept public garden rising to her brain. It was clear that Sam had mistaken the confused directions which alone she had been able to give him, or the *calèche* would never have been standing there, with the old coachman endeavouring to obtain information from some of his ebony brethren as to the best route to take, while Bessy and Belinda champed their bits in angry impatience at the delay.

Clarice felt very sick and faint, the heavy perfume of the orange-blossoms seemed to press upon her brain, and the sun was beginning to beat fiercely down upon her head.

Bright and beautiful the garden looked with its wreaths of myrtles, Cherokee roses, and Cape jessamines, but Clarice heeded them not, for her eyes were fixed on the old Spanish cathedral, round the door of which (even as in the days of her youth she had seen French beggars congregate about the city churches) many a miserable cripple crouched and begged for alms.

A shabby-looking priest passed close to the *calèche* as Clarice leaned back, pale and heart-sick, upon the cushions. He looked at her for a moment, then crossed himself, and muttering an *Ave Maria*, hurried on along the street. Fainter and fainter grew the feeble woman, so faint that a mist was beginning to spread itself before her eyes, when she suddenly caught sight of a closely-veiled figure clad in black, with long flowing robes, and a book of prayer held against her breast. Instinctively Clarice extended her hand to one whose mission on earth it was to tend the sick, and speak words of comfort to the

weary and the heavy laden, and happily the mute appeal did not pass unnoticed ; for the Sister of Charity, well versed in all the signs of physical as well as mental suffering, had no sooner caught a transient glimpse (for her heavy eyes were seldom raised to earthly objects) of Clarice's pale, wearied face than her steps were suddenly arrested, and laying her thin hand upon the carriage door, she said, in low, courteous tones,

‘ Madame est souffrante—pourrais-je lui venir en aide ? ’

CHAPTER XII.

‘Time but the impression deeper makes,
As streams their channels deeper wear.’

COULD she aid her? Could that holy woman, on whose breast the sacred symbol of salvation rested, deign to look with pity upon *her*, the frail and fallen one—upon her, the descendant of a despised Quadroon—on her upon whose head the sins of generations had been so sorely visited?

For a moment the revulsion of feeling caused by Sister Marie’s words—Zoe learned to know the name and dearly love its owner later—kept Clarice silent; but as the pitying nun still stood there, with the sun beating on a head covered only with her white hood and long black veil, Mrs. Gordon with an effort roused herself to answer, and choking back an hysterical sob that rose in her throat, she said in French—

'I thank you much. I am on my way to visit a poor woman, who is ill, and my coachman has mistaken the road. Perhaps you might know the place, you who visit all the poor and sick, madame—you and those of your blessed order.'

She took from her pocket the directions she had written down, and gave it to the nun, who, after a short examination, said,

'Bien! C'est cela, Madame—j'étais en route pour cette même demeure. Et si Madame le veut nous pourrions y aller ensemble.'

The offer was accepted with eager gratitude by Clarice, who, relieved by the sense of protection and companionship, had recovered from the nervous faintness which had so nearly overpowered her. Under Sister Marie's guidance the decaying hovel was soon found, and on the way Clarice listened, with almost ecstatic pleasure, to the soft, kind voice of her companion, as the latter spoke compassionately of the sufferings endured in patience by

the aged negress, whose term of trial, in this world at least, was so nearly at an end.

‘I was with her late last night,’ she said, ‘and then the poor old creature was very restless. At times her mind seemed wandering, and she spoke of what I suppose was her old life upon the plantation, of her house among the sugar canes, and of a time, many years ago, when her child, a very little girl, was taken to be sold into Texas.’

‘Ah!’ said Clarice, sadly, ‘that was before old Judith was bought by Mr. Gordon’s father—many years before. Her memory of that time was always very vivid, and she has told me many a pitiful tale of suffering when she was a field-hand on a plantation in Arkansas, where the owner was a Northern gentleman, and the driver a free black.’

‘I have heard,’ said Sister Marie, ‘that the negroes are always the least merciful of slave-owners—the negroes and the white men from the free States—who, I fear, do not always practise as many amongst them

preach. It has often wrung my heart to listen to the complaints of those who have been subjected to the caprice of passionate and exacting masters—men who have the *right* to work them to death, and who can be only punished by a fine if they treat them with cruelty—for *only* flogging, be the infliction ever so severe, there is no award at all against the offender.'

'It is, indeed, terrible to reflect upon,' said Clarice; 'and often, very often, since I have felt illness increasing upon me rapidly, I have reproached myself for not having used what little influence I possess in endeavouring to obtain the freedom of some few at least on—on—Mr. Gordon's plantation; not,' she continued, interrupting herself eagerly, 'that they are unhappy with us—I am very sure they are not; but because—because all is uncertain after the owner's death, and they may be sold to men who will show no mercy to the weak—who will part wives and husbands, and

take young children from their mothers' arms.'

'And,' said Sister Marie solemnly, 'who, besides that they will torture and destroy the perishable body, will make those human souls fit only for habitation with the evil spirits in the world beyond the grave. *Ah, madame! ma bonne madame!*—for you are kind—I see it in your face—could you, like me, have seen the miserable beings who are sometimes brought, diseased and dirt-covered, into our city hospitals, you would understand how terrible a destruction both of body and soul is worked by slavery! At first, my courage almost failed me, and I turned away from women often young, and some as fair almost as you are, who used such dreadful words, so blasphemous and vile, that they appeared almost to call a judgment down on those who spoke them. And yet—poor souls—the fault was none of theirs. God in his mercy had not made their hearts more black and sinful than those which he

has given both to you and me, to cleanse and make more fitted for the dwelling of his sacred spirit. So I prayed, *ma bonne madame*, for pardon for my sin—the sin that made me turn from those unhappy victims with disgust and horror—and I can watch and kneel beside them now, while the bad words pass over me unheard; but still, I trust not always unforgiven by the God who hears and pardons the poor, weak beings He has made.'

Sister Marie had scarcely finished speaking when Sam, turning suddenly round, exclaimed, gleefully,

'I tink dar de house, missus. Dar de house where ole Ju' lives, and dar's de lily nigger as toted down to our place to say ole Ju' she want to see Miss Clarice afore she go to glory.'

With this remark, Sam wound up his labours for the present, and reining in Bessy and Belinda with a suddenness intended to impress all passers-by with a high opinion of his coachmanship, the carriage came to a

stand-still, and Cæsar, dismounting from his footboard behind, assisted the ladies to descend.

Till that moment, engrossed as she had been by the interest of Sister Marie's remarks, and half bewildered by the novelty of the situation in which she found herself, Clarice had forgotten the almost certainty that the nun had yet to learn the actual position of the woman whom she had called her 'bonne madame,' and had mentally elevated into a fitting suppliant for the sins of the fallen and the frail.

But though forgotten for a moment, it was impossible that the iniquity which during a lifetime had weighed upon the unhappy woman's conscience should not cry out upon her, aloud and unrelentingly as she stood there—a poor, pale, blasted thing, side by side with the holy woman, and sworn servant in her Master's cause. Could she keep up the unholy farce, and carry with her secretly, that long indulged-in sin, into the humble

room made sacred by the approach of death, and the presence of the minstress of God? Could she bend lowly by the bed of that poor fellow-sinner, by whom her own great wickedness was known, and who—but no—her secret was safe with one whom habit had accustomed to see no evil in the life she led—no shame in the unlawful ties which bind the coloured race as slaves to white men's passions.

But though she ran no risk of any chance discovery through words likely to drop from the sick woman's lips, yet Clarice, shrinking, as I before said, from contaminating by her presence the pure air breathed round her by the pious sister, regretted the chance which had brought her into that close companionship, and felt more than half inclined to invent some suddenly-remembered reason for her return to a home where she had no reason to fear the presence of any who had a right to reproach her with her misdeeds.

CHAPTER XIII.

‘The *why* is plain as way to parish church.’

THE sun blazed out from the blue, cloudless dome of heaven, and lighted up with a relentless glare the haggard toil-worn countenance of the Sister of Charity. It was a face such as in her life Clarice had never seen before—a face quite joyless, and one on which no human passion, whether of love or hate, had ever left even the lightest and most fleeting impress. To Clarice—looking into those cold grey eyes, with yearning for some trace of gentle sympathy with her grief, the face of the meek nun appeared almost repellant, so void of every weakness natural to flesh and blood seemed that calm, still, marble face.

They entered the house together. It was, as I have said before, a miserable dwelling,

built of painted pine logs, between which time had worked many a space and gap, filled up by rags and whisps of cotton—anything, in short, to stop the ingress both of air and sound ; for Judith, the dying slave-woman, lay shivering there upon her miserable mattress, shivering despite the fever boiling in her veins and working wild confusion in her brain. Her daughter, a woman already far past middle age, and who was a domestic slave to a rich merchant in a fashionable street, came as often as she could be spared by her employers to nurse her aged parent, and see, as far as lay in her power, that the old soul lacked for nothing.

When Clarice and Sister Marie entered the room (it was the one adjoining that in which Angélique and the Yankee had hatched together their ungodly plot) the aged negress was alone, save for the presence of the small mischief-loving boy, her grandson, the same black elf whose intelligence had been so severely taxed in the delivery of his gran-

dame's messages, and whose opportune appearance whilst disporting himself outside the door had guided the coachman to old Judith's retreat.

The room was poorly furnished, with two mattresses laid upon the floor in separate corners, a small wooden table, and a shelf on which were a few articles of coarse crockery-ware for household use.

On a wretched bed, covered with the dirtiest of blankets, lay the emaciated form of the negress. The sharp lines of her fleshless limbs were clearly to be traced beneath the sheet of coarse, discoloured homespun calico; and on the pillow—if pillow it could be called, which was little more than a heap of ragged clothing pushed beneath the sick woman's head—lay and tossed the stricken creature in the restlessness of approaching dissolution.

Sister Marie crossed herself devoutly as she approached the bed with noiseless footsteps; while Clarice followed, trembling and

awe-struck, for the sight of death was strange to her, and this was the last enemy, in one of its most painful and distressing forms.

The boy Pete—he was but ten years old—too young by four-and-twenty months to be put to such small labour, as, at the age of twelve, is required of strong 'nigger' youths—the boy Pete, stimulated thereto by the curiosity and officiousness natural to his age, had preceded the visitors into the room, and without ceremony announced the fact of their presence to the dying woman.

'Dar be two ladies, granny, come along to see yer,' he shouted in the old creature's ear, and then, being gently pushed aside by Sister Marie, he retreated to a more respectful distance, and began scratching his woolly head with an air intended to represent infinite disgust at the affront which had been put upon him.

The black face lay upturned—with eyeballs white and glaring, and the flesh—the little that age had left her, drawn from the

toothless gums. Horror-struck at the sight, Clarice covered her face with her hands, shudderingly.

'*Ah Dieu*,' she cried involuntarily. 'Let us go. I cannot bear this! She is dead—we cannot help her, and the sight is more than I can endure.'

Sister Marie laid her hand authoritatively on the arm of the agitated woman.

'Hush,' she said, 'and learn to bear the sight of the last great enemy which we must all one day meet alone, and face to face. This woman is not dead,' she added, 'pouring out a few drops of pale-coloured liquid from a bottle she had brought with her, and holding it to the aged creature's lips,—' You will feel better soon, poor soul,' she continued in a gentler voice, and in those distinct clear tones which reach the brain through the thickened senses of the deaf,—' You will be better soon, and able to pray to God once more, and to the Blessed Virgin, for forgiveness.'

She raised the poor old weary head, while,

aided by Clarice, she endeavoured to smoothe the comfortless pillow, over which she spread her own white handkerchief. Then she closed the rough grey cotton covering over the bony chest, and this done, she slowly sank upon her knees beside the bed, and prayed silently.

It was not long before the medicine administered by Sister Marie began to show its effects, for old Judith muttered a few words, incoherently at first, but which gradually assumed more meaning and consistency. She turned her eyes first on the nun's kneeling figure, and then on Clarice standing at the bed's head with the small jewelled hand (that in days gone by had been often pressed to Judith's lips in respectful token of attachment) resting on the dingy bed covering.

'My missus—my own lubly lady—she come to ole Judith in the 'tarnal city. She sit at de gate wid Ju', and praise de Lord in de air.'

The dim eyes were rolling still, but there was less of wildness in their gaze, and Sister Marie taking instant advantage of the short interval of reason, held a crucifix before the face, working with convulsive twitches, and recited in a low, monotonous tone a prayer to the Mother of Mercy for the sick and dying.

CHAPTER XIV.

‘ And here they no longer weep,
Here where complaint is still,
And they no longer feel,
Here where all gladness flies.’

How much the sick woman heard and understood of that solemn preparation for the great change, it would be hard to say. For a while she lay quite still, and Sister Marie must surely have concluded that the dying Christian listened, and understood, or she would scarcely have wasted her breath and time in pious exhortations.

The soothing cordial administered by the Sister of Charity had been a powerful one—powerful to soothe at first—but calculated also to rouse what latent energy remained in the worn-out wasted frame. For a few minutes after swallowing it, Judith experienced an inclination to silence, and to slumber; but

this sensation subsiding under the influence of Mrs. Gordon's presence, and the memories it invoked—the ruling passion, strong in death—of love for Clarice—and the hearing of her own voice, woke up once more; and Judith's patience, whilst apparently attending to the Sister's monotonous voice, began—we regret to say—rapidly to fail her. She had—rather late in life—it is true; learnt habits of courtesy in Mrs. Gordon's service, the which habits, to say nothing of her gratitude to the good sister, and her respect for religion generally, prompted her to silence; but there are bounds to human patience, especially when the hours, nay, the very minutes, are numbered; and Judith finding that the mingled exhortation and prayer of the devout sister was likely to continue for a very indefinite period, moved her head uneasily on her pillow, saying at the same time, in a hesitating voice which grew firmer as she proceeded,—

‘Dose berry good words, missus—too good for ole nigger like—poor Judith, claring out

for de 'appy land, missus, and 'pears I could go to Gorra Mighty, widout no words—begging yer pardon, missus—but 'pears like I could sleep a spell.'

She contrived—it must have been a work of difficulty, with death's tightening grasp upon her muscles—to *wink* her aged eye feebly at her mistress, a token which the latter rightly understood to mean that the mention of sleep was a *ruse*, and that old Judith was quite sufficiently wide awake to enjoy a last conversation with her lady.

That the old slave's object was to get rid of the excellent sister whose presence was an effectual bar to a confidential *tête-à-tête* with her mistress, was very evident; and Clarice was mentally cogitating on the best means for the effecting of this end when Judith spoke again,—

'The Lord, he berry good, missus. He send de prayerful lady to poor ole Jude, but de time it berry short, and I be gwine slick to de 'tarnal city, and hab sometink to say to

Madam Gordon afore I go dar. 'Spect I'd better say it den at onst, before de Lord he come for ole Jude's soul.'

There was such a distressing expression of almost agonized anxiety on the poor old face, as the dying woman pleaded to the nun, that the latter, compassionating her evident distress, arrested the reproof which was on her lips, and said kindly,

'Your time is indeed short, nor must it be wasted unnecessarily in worldly matters. What you say you had best say quickly, and then prepare to make your peace with God. You are a Catholic, my poor woman, a humble and lowly follower of our most holy faith, and therefore it is your duty to confess to the priest, whose coming cannot be long delayed. With God there is no respect of persons, and absolution will be freely given to all who truly and in earnest repent them of their sins.'

She crossed herself devoutly more than once during this harangue, and then with a kind of sweeping reverence (whether to the

lady or the mighty sovereign so soon to reign there paramount, was a mystery to Clarice), she slowly left the room.

'Tanks be to Gorra Mighty dat she gone at last,' said Judith, with a sigh of relief as the door closed upon Sister Marie. 'She make me feel kind o' ugly wid her talkee, talkee. She berry good woman, but too much lub de clapper of her own tongue, and dat no good when de time is precious, missus.'

She looked up with the fond affection of a dying dog into the kind face that bent over her; and Clarice, touched by the mute evidence of affection, and feeling how soon the heart of one among the few who loved her, would be still for ever, lowered her own pale lips till they touched the wrinkled forehead of the faithful slave, and pressed a kiss there tenderly.

'Gorra Mighty bless you, my own missus,' came huskily from the half-paralyzed tongue, while scanty tears trembled on the quivering eyelids.

'Stay close to Jude and listen. I hab to tell you sometink dreadfu'—sometink I heard last night. Oh dear! oh dear! I wish I'd nebber left de lubly lily lady. She safe wid poor ole Jude—she—'

'Heavens!' interrupted Clarice, 'what is it that you mean, Judith? What danger is threatening my daughter? Speak quickly, for God's sake, and let me know the worst.'

'Dere be 'ansome gen'l'man in love wid Missy Zoe,' was Judith's low-voiced answer to the mother's eager questioning. 'He meet her in de garden, and put his arm about her, and kiss, and dar's one sees it all, and tells it to a big tall ugly Yankee massa as comes here sometimes, and meets a yaller gal in de oder room behind.'

'A tall Yankee—a man that comes here secretly to meet a coloured woman!—a woman too who tells him all that passes in our house!—a spy upon our actions!—and on Zoe, on my pure-hearted girl! Judith, this is impossible. Surely you must be dreaming—

I cannot believe this terrible story to be true.'

'Didn't I say it would be dreadful, and would make you kind o' mad? But there's more left to say. De gen'l'man as comes dar he gib dollars to de yaller gal for all she say, and den he talk of oder tings—of money, and dat soon he'll hab de Orange Creek Plantation his own self; and den I feel right down mad, and so I tell you.'

'And this is what you sent for me to hear? O Judith, tell me more. Say what seemed to be the man's intention in coming to this place? Why does he care to hear about my child, and how is it that you know so much of what was said between them?'

'It was de night afore de last, missus, and Suke, my darter—she grown berry ole, I tink—hadn't been then to put de cotton in de holes, and so I lay in bed and heard between de chinks what dey two was saying.'

'But you did not see their faces?' asked Clarice eagerly.

‘No, I nebber saw dar faces, but lily Pete he saw dem, and called de man a big, tall, ugly Yankee. He said—I mind it well—he’d sell up Massa Gordon, and by de mor—ma—Ah, missus! ole Ju’ berry sick, and big words don’t come nat’ral like.’

She heaved a weary sigh as she spoke the last words, and Clarice noticed that her voice had grown far weaker, and that her utterance had become more indistinct.

A sudden panic seized at this conviction upon the poor trembling mother, who felt how much depended on the information which it might be yet in Judith’s power to afford.

‘Speak to me once more, dear Judith,’ she exclaimed; ‘only one word, to say if you can guess the name of her who met that villain here. It is so terrible to have a secret enemy—so dangerous to—’

She paused, seeing that Judith seemed about to speak again.

‘I tink,’ the latter muttered; ‘I tink it—I’

—(her mind wandering)—‘I see de gate—de gate of glory wid my own missus stanning dar in de white robes, wid de angels—’

A strange laugh, almost a shout of triumph, broke from her lips; it rang through the room, calling back—it was a wild discordant summons—both Sister Marie and the negro boy to their respective places in the room.

It was evident to one experienced in the signs of approaching dissolution, that a very few minutes more remained for Judith in this world of sorrow, and that her death-agony might almost be said to have commenced.

‘Leave her to us,’ said Sister Marie, solemnly. ‘Do you not hear the bell? It is the priest coming to perform the last sacred rites for a departing soul. Madame, *your* duties here are over, and ours have begun. Leave this dying woman to the Church, in the name of our Blessed Lady, and of the Holy Saints in Heaven.’

The nun's voice had taken an almost imploring tone as she discovered, to her consternation, that Clarice still bending over the aged form was whispering, in the dulled ear, last words which seemed those of entreaty and exhortation.

'One word,' the unhappy woman implored. 'One word, dear Judith; for my sake try to think, try to remember, who was the coloured girl. The girl, Judith!—Judith!' she repeated, her voice loud and shrill in her great excitement—'The girl that spoke of Zoe, your own little Zoe, that you loved so dearly once, and who may be lost if you do not try to save her.'

'Ole Jude try—missus,' muttered the expiring creature, recalled as it seemed from beneath the shadow of death by that pleading voice.

'Ole Jude, try to save Miss Zoe—dat dar gal I tink was—nebber tell missus—you come near—I'm gwine—gwine—gwine!'

'Oh, Judith, I implore you—think of me—think of Zoe—think—'

‘Think of your perishing soul,’ broke in the deep hollow voice of the priest; the same who had turned away with a muttered *Ave* from poor Clarice at the cathedral door.

‘Think of your lost soul; and you, O sinful woman, who have dared to come, laden with your unrepented-of and unabsolved transgressions, into the presence of these sacred elements—to you I say depart and defile not by your shameless, guilty face the presence of the dying.’

He moved with a countenance cold and merciless past the conscience-stricken woman, an attendant following, bearing the holy oil, whilst a little coloured boy, clad in a surplice of unbleached cotton, kept up a continual tinkling which mingled with, and half-subdued, the sound of poor old Judith’s death-rattle.

One glance did Clarice cast upon the faithful servant whose eyes would soon be closed for ever, and then she tottered from the room, scarcely noticing, so overpowering

was her agitation, that a hand was stretched from out the black serge mantle covering a kneeling form, and that her own cold trembling fingers were pressed for one short instant within those of the Sister of Charity.

CHAPTER XV.

‘Commerce has set the mark of selfishness,
The signet of its all-enslaving power,
Upon a shining ore, and called it gold.’

‘You see, squire, ’taint to be done at no price. Fact is, I’d taken a fancy to the land, and to your lot o’ niggers, and if I’m a-gwine to foreclose, which will eventuate, I reckon, I’m sorry, in course, if it don’t meet your views, but guess you must put up with it this turn, and get along more slick in other diggings.’

This speech, as the reader will probably have had no difficulty in guessing, proceeded from the mouth of Mr. John L. Morse (‘*Hell* Morse,’ as he was called where best known, and particularly in the State of Arkansas, where his business often took him), and the individual to whom it was addressed

was no other than the unfortunate owner, in name at least, of Orange Creek Plantation.

Since the interview between Clarice and the dying slave, events bearing upon the destiny of our heroine had succeeded one another with startling rapidity. Only a week before the day when Gordon sat, a crushed and ruined man, in the bar-room of the St. Charles, listening to his tormentor's boastful threats, Zoe's father had, to all appearance, been a happy and a prosperous member of society. In his establishments, both in town and country, he could, as we have seen, vie in luxury with the richest of the land. In his household arrangements everything was conducted on a scale of liberality which proved him to be at least regardless of expense; his hospitality was unbounded, and he could boast the luxury of a French cook, a certain Monsieur Adolphe, who had been tempted by almost fabulous wages to leave his blissful *pied à terre* in the neighbourhood of the Palais Royal for the miry banks of the

Mississippi, where, to use his own words, *le poisson n'existait pas*, the oysters were *gros comme des assiettes*, and the only animals worthy of being submitted to his culinary skill were the *gêlinottes*, as he denominated them, *id est*, the prairie-hens of the South, and the canvas-back ducks from the neighbourhood of the monumental city of Baltimore.

But while the Louisianian world looked on admiringly at the rich planter's unvarying display of wealth and lavish hospitality, the Valley of the Mississippi—ay, and for that matter, all the States of the Union—did not contain an individual more effectually and completely ruined than that same reckless Southern gentleman. The fact of the estate known as Orange Creek Plantation being heavily mortgaged was no secret to many; but then, rottenness of this description is a condition so normal in the Southern States, that to look for soundness in the affairs of property would be regarded in the light of a folly. The sudden transition from riches to

poverty—the constant *see-sawing*, if I may so call it, in the American commercial world (where speculating is the rule, and living within the income a rare exception indeed) are too well known for comments on such vicissitudes to be called for here; and, therefore, so long as Mr. Gordon's handsome equipages continued to be seen dashing along the Shell road, and his own well-dressed person was to be met with nightly in the ball and gambling rooms, the busy tongues of rumour were silent regarding his embarrassments, and even his intimate friends abstained from 'calkilating' his chances for the future.

The two men, the so-called wealthy Southern planter, and the speculating Yankee who had contrived to obtain such absolute power over the destinies of the prodigal slave-owner, were indulging in a succession of cooling drinks in the bar-room of the monster hotel. The night was warm, and their blood was heated both by play and alcohol. Of the two the Northerner was most master of himself;

he had been winning largely, too, at *écarté*, his victim being no other than the man whose ruin was already so nearly consummated, and in consequence the Yankee's spirit had risen to fever pitch.

'Tell yer she's the 'ansomest figure of a gal I've seen in the States; none o' yer milk-and-water whey-faced critters, but rale warm flesh and blood—ripe and ready, too, I'm darned if she aint.'

He spoke in a loud, nasal, twanging voice, and as the bar was, as usual, crowded with customers, *habitués* of the place—*roués*, young and old—on the watch for the excitement of a new love affair; a tale of scandal, or of bloodshed; it followed as a matter of course that the ears of those idle loungers were pricked up eagerly, while Morse descanted with more of warmth than delicacy on Zoe Gordon's beauty. The planter, notwithstanding his state of demi-intoxication, was not disposed to endure calmly the boastful and insulting tone assumed by John Link

Morse. Moreover, his old love for Clarice and her daughter had returned with added strength in this his season of trial and affliction. When the world went well with him, and as long as he had hoped to live out all his days in luxury and enjoyment, he had thought but little of his faithful womankind at home; but now — now in the darkness and the gloom—he looked around him for a guiding star, and found it in his own abiding-place—where, through the garish summer day it had been hidden from his view.

He bit his lips till the blood sprang from beneath the pressure of his teeth, and clenched his hand in powerless fury—powerless, indeed, for the accursed Yankee had him in his toils—and only through the leniency of the man who had *bought up the mortgage on Orange Creek Plantation* could he hope for mercy.

The moment was a dreadful one for the proud Southern planter; and in that moment the wrongs of many a victim to his un-

bridled passions were, in part at least, avenged. He forced himself—it was an almost superhuman task—to smile upon the ‘cowardly blackguard’ (he called the man habitually to others by such names as this), and then he took him by the arm, and through his close-clenched teeth, invited him to come home with him to supper—to supper with ‘the ladies’—with the delicate and dying Clarice, and, ah! best boon of all, with that fair creature in her ripe, glorious beauty, of whom the unmanly suitor had dared to speak in coarse, familiar terms in the presence of ‘rowdy revellers’ in the public bar.

Link looked with surprise at the girl’s father, as the latter urged him to finish the evening with the planter’s family. He had expected, nay had half feared, some explosion of wrath, and something in Gordon’s composure alarmed him.

‘Gol darn the fellar,’ he said to himself, he’s up to some tarnation trick, I reckon. These swell heads o’ Southerners don’t let a

fellar talk about their females, let 'em be nigger gals or not, without a spell of knifing or fire-ironing. Thank you, squire' (this was said aloud), 'you're very polite, an' its mor'n I expected, but I've got to go to home. Reckon I've had a pig-and-whistle too much this spell.'

He disengaged his arm from Gordon's as he spoke, and after charging that infinitely-disgusted gentleman to remember him to the lovely angel 'to hum,' he staggered rather than walked away in the direction of the St. Louis Hotel.

For a moment Gordon, with a lowering brow, and hatred at his heart, gazed after the retreating figure, and then a sudden thought appearing to strike him, he pressed his hat firmly on his brows, and with an air of determination which had of late been very foreign to his appearance, he hurried away beneath the trembling lamplights to his home.

CHAPTER XVI.

‘Thus with the year
Seasons return, but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of ev’n or morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer’s rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine.’

AMONG the many evils attendant on the description of ties which alone bound Clarice to the man who owned her, the absence of mutual confidence cannot be counted amongst the least. Where there are no interests in common, deception on either side, or both, must be of constant occurrence, and the description of *gêne* which naturally follows is terribly subversive of daily comfort.

On her way from her agitating interview with old Judith, Clarice’s whole soul was occupied by the momentous question, namely, whom in this emergency she should trust? That it could not be Gordon was decided by

her in a moment. She had not now to learn of what fiery particles the blood of Southern men is composed, nor need she at that late hour be warned of the danger she would run in revealing all she knew and feared to Mr. Gordon.

It was not the first time that Clarice had suspected herself to be an object of jealousy to some coloured woman anxious to take the place which she had often found so hard to fill in the home and the affections of the Planter. That something of the kind was at work now, she did not for a moment doubt, and it was this conviction that made her decide at once to keep the whole affair a secret from Zoe's father.

As far as regarded any peril or annoyance to herself, she would have taken no measures of precaution; for, were not her days numbered? and had not death already knocked more than once, and that loudly, at her door? But it was not so with that young, precious life—the life but just begun of her own dear

one—her loved and only child. And Clarice, distracted by the thought of Zoe's danger, determined at last upon a measure, which under any other circumstances, she would have shrunk from with embarrassment and alarm.

That the dangerous mortal whose devoted attentions had been commented on by the unknown coloured girl was no other than Charley Seymour, she never for an instant doubted. It was true that Zoe had seldom spoken lately of her lover, and never, in words at least, seemed anxious for his coming; but though there had been far less of feverish restlessness in her girl's looks and manner, Clarice had not failed to notice in its stead, an air—it might have been a mother's fancy—of voluptuous tranquillity and repose; and Clarice was certain—more certain even than if words had been called in as affirmative of her belief, that something decisive had occurred between her child and the man she loved—something that gave depth and lustre to her languid eyes, and parted the sweet

lips with a fond, passionate smile when memory called back rapturous moments never in a lifetime to be effaced.

Strange to say, Clarice could not question Zoe on the subject, which both felt was for ever dwelling in the thoughts of each. It might be that the mother feared to blush before her child, knowing how little right she had to lecture or advise ; or (but that was less likely still) the anxious woman might have dreaded—despite her trust in Zoe's purity—to learn that—but no ! one look on those clear maiden eyes—one glance at the smooth forehead, on which no transient thought of evil had left its sullying trace, were sufficient to send back the mother's fleeting suspicion to her own aching conscience, while in her heart of hearts she prayed that the uncharitable thought might never be dreamt of or suspected by the child whom she had wronged.

A clear and joyous melody was ringing out and filling even the flower-scented verandah, when Mrs. Gordon returned from the visit

she had paid to dying Judith. A pleasant sound it was—a page in life's early history to turn back to when the dull volume will be nearly closed, and the five last dismal letters will stand sadly out on the blank, empty page which we shall turn no more.

Very happy on that bright spring day was Zoe, for she was at the blissful age when to live is to enjoy—and when, to use the poet's words, 'we are blessed, we scarce know why'—blessed in our getting up and lying down—in our waking moments and in our hours of slumber.

But, glad as were the ringing sounds, they found no answering echo in the mother's anxious heart; for well she knew, whose days were dwindling to a span, how fleeting are the joys of youth, and that the hours are short indeed when every fleecy cloud seems to possess a 'golden hem,' and when

'This lovely world, the hills, the sward—
They all look fresh, as if our Lord
But yesterday had finished them.'

Gladly would the tender mother, whose own existence had been so early blighted, have drawn a pleasant augury for her daughter's future in that clear-ringing melody; but that ideal comfort was forbidden by her past experience in life's bitter truths, for well the dying woman knew that, linger as we may beneath the summer sun, the biting winds of colder days will come at last, and that autumn, with its fall of yellow leaves, and quickly darkening hours—autumn, when the buds have ceased to blossom and the birds to sing—autumn, given in a human year but once, bids us, with solemn voice, make ready for the winter's frosts.

Poor Clarice ! As she heard the joyous song ring out, and listened to the full, rich chords, striking so sharp and shrill upon the gladsome melody, felt a heavy weight of apprehension lower over her spirit, and laying her thin hand upon the perfect shoulder, warm with youth and health, that was

turned towards her, she bade the girl be silent.

'I have been with the dead, my Chérie,' she said solemnly, 'and music such as that seems out of time and place.'

The last notes of the '*La donna e mobile*' seemed still lingering on the air, when Zoe, in obedience to her mother's slightest wish, rose from her seat, and throwing her arm tenderly round Mrs. Gordon's waist, half led, half carried, the frail over-tired woman to the nearest couch. She looked so pale and faint that Zoe was almost terrified, and kneeling down beside her, bathed her forehead with iced water.

'*Mama mia*,' she murmured between the kisses which she pressed on the pallid cheeks; '*Mama mia*, why did you go? This has been too much for you. What will my father say? He is in the next room, or at least he was just now—and—'

'Hush! my child,' said Clariçe, almost wildly. 'Say nothing to your father. He

must not know I have been absent. *Must not.* Do you understand me, Zoe? And now, my darling, give me pen and ink, and paper, that deep mourning paper. I have to write a warning—a warning—' she muttered with a disordered manner, painfully evident to Zoe, 'a warning from the dead.'

The writing materials were brought, and the shaking hand began to trace some feeble lines upon the page. Chérie, with instinctive delicacy and good breeding, turned away her head, busying herself (the while her mother wrote) with arranging some flowers in a vase on a *jardinière* behind the sofa.

A very few scratches of the pen—a note hastily enclosed and sealed, and then the weak voice, broken as it too often was by a hollow cough, begged Zoe to ring for a messenger by whom the note might be carried to the town.

'To Mr. Davenport Seymour,' said the mistress, when Cæsar, with his usual elaborate *salam*, half bow half curtsy, awaited her directions.

‘To Mr. Davenport Seymour—and I must have, if possible, an immediate answer.’

On hearing that name Zoe could no longer contain her impatience, and kneeling down once more beside the couch, she took the hot feverish hand in hers, and with something of the thoughtless selfishness of youth entreated to be told the subject of the missive.

‘Not now, my pet,’ said the poor weary woman, ‘I feel so very tired—you shall know all, later, love,’ she added, noticing the keen look of disappointment that spread over the expressive face, ‘but now I must have rest—rest to enable me to perform my mission—rest,’ she whispered to herself, as Zoe rose rather discontentedly from her kneeling attitude, ‘rest to enable me to save my child!’

CHAPTER XVII.

‘ O slavery ! thou frost of the world’s prime,
Killing its flowers, and leaving its thorns bare !
Thy touch has stamped these limbs with crime ;
These brows thy branding garland bear ;
But the free heart, th’ impassive soul,
Scorn thy control.’

ON that evening, between the hours of nine and ten, Mr. Davenport Seymour called by appointment on Mrs. Gordon, and remained with her in close and earnest conversation till the midnight hour had long since struck. What passed between them during that lengthened interview will be best explained by repeating a conversation held two days afterwards in the privacy of Charley Seymour’s apartments at the St. Louis Hotel, between that young gentleman and his elder brother.

‘ That’s a wonderful fellow—that man they

call Link Morse,' was Davenport's opening remark, while busied in lighting a prime regalia.

'A wonderful brute,' responded Charley, puffing out a cloud of smoke with rather unnecessary vigour.

'Brute or no brute,' continued Davenport, 'he seems to be making good running for Gordon's daughter; and it's a disgusting thing to see; for the girl's a good girl as well as a beautiful one, and meant for better things than to be the mistress of a low-bred, drunken slave speculator like that.'

Charley did not answer this tirade for several minutes, but when he did, it was in the slow, concentrated tones which generally mean mischief.

'*His* mistress!—Miss Gordon the mistress of that snivelling, dirty Yankee! Ha, ha—the joke's too good by half—why, man, what put such an idea as that into your head?'

'What would have put it into yours, if you hadn't been blinded by your own passion.

Now, Charley, don't get into one of your boyish rages, old fellow. I'm twenty years your senior—nearly old enough to be your father; and you ought to know by this time that your happiness is as dear to me as my own.'

He paused, as if waiting for a reply, but as none came, he continued boldly, and with a total disregard to Charley's probable anger, which was not without its effect.

'Charles, I think you cannot be blind to the fact that Mrs. Gordon is dying.'

'Zoe does not think so,' said Charley, in a low tone.

'Perhaps not, but that does not alter the reality, which is, that not only is she dying, but dying with her spirit tortured by many cares—those concerning her daughter being the heaviest and most unendurable.'

'I do not see why she should make herself uneasy about Zoe, unless the woman has an idea that the girl may fall into the jaws of that lean-visaged male harpy; and of the

total impossibility of that it may be as well to assure her.'

'By suggesting, I suppose, the "Scylla," which, by avoiding "Charybdis," will probably be the fatal alternative of that poor, unsuspecting girl! Charley! have you the heart to do this thing? Can you reconcile it to your sense of honour to take that "one little ewe lamb" from the dying mother when—'

'When there is a whole flock to choose from. Well, I grant you that our famous "Institution" provides us amply with a stock of easy beauties, from whom we may select our temporary companions. But,' he added, dropping the light tone he had assumed, and speaking with an energy that almost startled the sober-minded Davenport,—'But we are speaking now of Zoe Gordon, and her name must not be mixed up with those who can be bought and sold—those whom we nightly meet with in those dens of female corruption—the Quadroon balls, where mothers parade

their children before the highest bidder for that priceless thing—their virtue!’

‘Poor creatures! Poor, degraded, miserable souls! And, as you say, Charley, Zoe Gordon must not—cannot—be classed with women such as these. At the same time—now, hear me patiently, for I am appealing to you at the request of one who has a right to speak in the poor child’s defence. At the same time—and whilst fully admitting Zoe Gordon’s claims to admiration and respect—the question must arise, and—and—be decided, Charley, between us two to-night: What is to be the end of your—your flirtation with Jaspar Gordon’s daughter?’

A cloud—heavy and portentous—passed over the young man’s face, and he was about to answer in terms which even a brother such as Davenport would have found it difficult to forgive, when the latter stopped him by repeating still more impressively than before, that he was but the agent and emissary of a woman — and that woman

one whose dying prayer could hardly be rejected.

‘Her mother—well—I had not thought of her, poor woman! But, Davy, you must know as well as she does, that here, even if I would, I could not marry her, and that—that by taking advantage of Zoe’s love—I speak of it in the strictest confidence, and without coxcombery, to you alone—by taking advantage of that poor child’s love, I should but save her from an otherwise inevitable fate—the fate of becoming the mistress of some cold-hearted sensual brute, who would cast her adrift with scanty ceremony when the novel passion was spent, and a fresh object of attraction had come across his path.’

‘Then I am to conclude,’ began Davenport, sadly—

‘Conclude nothing but that I adore the very ground that Zoe Gordon treads on! Conclude nothing but that far from injuring her in word, or thought, or deed, my life is spent in forming projects for her happiness!’

'A happiness in which I fear religion and virtue have little share.'

'There you wrong me. There you wrong us both,' cried Charley, eagerly. 'You do not know—you cannot imagine the angelic purity of that girl's mind. You may doubt it,' he continued, still more excitedly, for a remembrance of his own fair young wife had called a rather meaning smile to his brother's lips. 'You may doubt the fact that one of that poor race of Pariahs—a woman of the blighted South—can be a model of perfect womanly modesty; but you must remember that Zoe was not educated in a country where the fruit of knowledge is plucked early from the tree—her mind was not enlarged betimes by witnessing and hearing of all the vices so common in our sin-infested climate—her heart—but enough of this—the time may come when you will do more justice to this daughter of a poor Quadroon; for you, with all your broad philanthropy, have prejudices, my good brother—prejudices

against the loathed negro race—prejudices which I, too, was born with, but have shaken off, thank God, in foreign travel, and in converse with the more enlightened of mankind.'

'And the result of this *dégourdissement* is to—'

'To convince me that a nobler, truer, purer wife than Zoe Gordon may one day be to me, does not live to bless the home of one whose love will never fail her! God bless her, Davy, and guard her for me in her sweet virgin loveliness, for I have sworn to leave her free while that poor woman lives—sworn to her that when she has left home and country to follow me to distant Europe, a priest of her own faith shall join our hands, and then—oh, Davy—what a life of bliss we have before us. A warm heart from the sunny South, virtue in which to trust, and children reared where the deep curse of slavery rests not on the land, and young, fresh natures cannot be degraded by the spectacle of its many evils.

'You have drawn a pleasant sketch,' said Davenport, after a pause. 'But you have forgotten, or rather probably you are in ignorance of two circumstances, which, if delineated rightly, would form a somewhat gloomy background to the picture.'

'And these circumstances are?—'

'The fact that Jaspar Gordon is a gambling bankrupt on the verge of ruin, and that his daughter Zoe—the girl whom you would make your wife—is still a *slave*.'

At this piece of intelligence, for which he was evidently unprepared, Charles Seymour sprang with an almost convulsive movement from his chair, exclaiming, as he did so—

'Good God! Can this be possible? Gordon ruined! and his daughter—no, no, this cannot be—his daughter—that fair, delicate girl still liable to the laws which give one man the power of disposing, for no fault or crime of theirs, of the liberties of their fellow-creatures! Davy! Can this be true?

And if so, tell me when and where you learnt this dreadful news.'

'From the voice of common rumour, confirmed by my own searching investigations, and last of all, from the lips of Mrs. Gordon herself, who, two days since, invited me to her house, in the hope that I would advise her how to act in this great emergency.'

'Two days ago, and this is the first that I have heard of it? Davy, was this kind or brotherly? Was it doing as you would be done by to keep such knowledge from me, when you guessed—when you might have felt certain indeed, that to me it would be a matter of such vital import?'

'I could not help it. It was owing to no neglect, or fault of mine, but to circumstances over which I had positively no control. An engagement, long since entered into, obliged me to go down the river as far as Carroll's Plantation. As he is selling land and stock in order to leave the country, I could not put him off; and you, my dear

fellow, were nowhere to be found, carefully as I sought for you.'

'True,' said Charley, reseating himself as though partially mollified by this explanation. 'True; I was absent for several hours yesterday morning. Would to Heaven it had not been so. But Zoe's horse had grown to be too much for her, a hard-mouthed brute with the devil's own temper, and I went out beyond Pontchartrain to look at a young mare I thought would suit her. Poor child! and she is still—Good God! I cannot say the word, and Gordon is—a scoundrel, for whom no name is too opprobrious, for thus delaying to provide for an emergency which might at any day occur. Davy, it is enough to make the iciest blood boil up to fever-heat within the veins, to think the man can live and sleep in peace, knowing that should he die in debt his child will be the property—the *property*, like the rest of her race—the goods and chattels—God!—it nearly drives me mad — of any man who

bids for her with the vile dross called dollars.'

'I cannot wonder at your irritation, only, I own, not being in love with the young lady myself, that the mere fact of her beauty does not greatly aggravate the atrocity of such cases. Gordon's neglect and supineness are perfectly unjustifiable; no fresh instance, however, of the utter recklessness of our Southern nature can surprise me. Nowhere is life, for many causes, so uncertain; and yet in no part of the civilized world do men so utterly neglect to make provision for the future.

'But I do not understand,' said Charley, musingly, 'how the hopeless ruin you talk of can have been brought about; and still more impossible is it to conceive that the same lavish expenditure and boundless hospitality—the same apparent possession of ready money to an unlimited extent can still exist, when, as you imply, this man's estate is mortgaged to the utmost, and ruin is staring him in the face.'

‘As to the “ruin,” that is easily accounted for in the old way; namely, European travel, with its ostentatious display of Cræsus-like wealth. And then the hotel life at home, with its card-playing, its hazard, and its billiard-rooms. To say nothing—although that should have been mentioned first and foremost—of the constant habit of always trusting to a good crop—living up to and beyond their means—borrowing to the extent of their credit for negro-stock—going ahead without thought or reflection for the future; and finally, as is the case with our friend Gordon, finding his mortgages bought up by a low-moneyed man like John Link Morse, who threatens to foreclose, and—’

But Charley had heard enough, the danger hanging over the head of his adored Zoe broke upon him with overwhelming force, and without so much as a farewell word to his brother, he seized his hat, and hurried from the room and from the house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

‘ All evil thoughts and deeds ;
Anger and lust and pride ;
The foulest, rankest weeds
That choke life’s groaning tide—

‘ These are the woes of slaves ;
They glare from the abyss ;
They cry from unknown graves,
“ We are the witnesses ! ” ’

‘ My Pauline, my dear-loved friend, at last I have good news to send you. At last I can answer your inquiries by saying that I am happy. Happy, my *bien aimée* ! ah ! could you but see me in this earthly paradise—see me with those I love around me—my mother, my own beautiful mother, whom I have often described to you as I thought that I remembered her, but who is in reality so far above all words of mine to paint. And then the luxury of our life !—the glorious, ever-shining sun ; the flowers heavy with a perfume un-

known in colder lands, for at this moment, whilst I write to you, the very air outside seems laden with the breath of thousands of violets, with jessamines and budding roses. And yet it is only March. But such a March! None of the cold east winds we can remember, sweeping round the corners when we went slowly and in pairs to church, and came back blue and pinched to the scant Sunday dinner at the dear old *Pensionnat*. For the place is still most dear to me, my Pauline. Dear, for 'twas there I knew you first, *ma chérie*—there that your good, kind brother came to take us—giddy, foolish children that we were—to the beautiful old château amidst the silent hills, where we were both so merry and so glad. For I was happy there too, Pauline; and sometimes, even when I think my heart is full to overflowing with new hopes and joys, a memory of the dear old place steals over me, and well-nigh turns my smiles to tears. For weeks after I had arrived here, Chérie, my heart was very heavy. Between us the broad

ocean stretched so wide and wild, restless and angry, like (whose words are they that I quote?) an endless menace from the Great Omnipotent. And then I feared that you and Monsieur Alfred would forget me—it is so likely in that great distracting Paris, where nothing can remind you of poor absent Zoe. But since a few weeks, Pauline, I have been comforted, for my mother has been growing better and far stronger. Last week, the first time for many, many days, she went out quite alone to drive; and though she stayed out long, she was not tired, at least not very; and in the evening she sat up to hear me sing and talk to Mr. Seymour. I wrote you once about him, *chère*—the gentleman who often comes to see us here; and—ah! Pauline, I did not think to tell you more, but it is such a happiness to open out the heart to one who loves us; and Charles Seymour, he is a very handsome, loyal gentleman, *chère amie*—and—and he does love me, Pauline—loves me so that life seems holier, brighter, clearer since he has

whispered words I never thought to hear, and bade me wait in hopes one day to be his wife. You will say but little of all this, *ma chère*, to your kind parents, and less still to Monsieur Alfred. I know not why, but I half fear he would look grave and cold, and think his sister's friend had grown too forward in her transatlantic home. Yet still he is too good not to feel glad that I am happy, and one day, *bien aimée*, perhaps—for Charley says so—I may come back to France, and thank you once again for all the love and tenderness you showed to the half-orphaned Zoe.'

She had finished the letter—the writing of it had cost her some little pains ; and the girl sat at her open window watching the fire-flies as they disported themselves in the darkness amidst the blushing oleanders, and the wax-like petals of the white-blossomed camellias. A reverie, half-gladsome and half-sad, retained her there in silence, long after the household had retired to rest ; and although she fancied that she still heard from time to time the

voices of her parents in a neighbouring room, she never thought of joining them, but sat there still, her elbow resting on the window-sill, and her fair cheek softly fanned by the light breezes of the night.

Meanwhile, and in the room where early in the evening Mrs. Gordon had hailed with delight the rare arrival at that hour of the master of the house, the two whose voices had broken faintly on the stillness of the midnight hour were discoursing of her future, and one at least was entirely absorbed in projects for her welfare.

‘If you knew, my Jaspar,’ Clarice was saying, ‘how often, by night as well as by day, through weary months of illness, I have dwelt upon this moment, you would not wonder at my agitation. I have so longed to speak to you of Zoe—so prayed for strength and courage to ask you if to my child you had restored the precious gift which God has given to all—the gift, dear love, of freedom, which your laws have stolen from the people of my race.’

'Your race! Pshaw, Clarice, that is nonsense! Your race—why, darling, there can hardly in your veins remain one drop of coloured blood, while, as for Zoe—the child is fair as any Northern girl; and with her golden-tinted hair, and glorious hazel eyes, she'll give some men a heartache, I'll be bound, before she's done with 'em.'

He lit a chamber candle as he spoke—a hint for Clarice to retire for the night; but for the first time in her life she overlooked his wish, and rising very slowly from her lounging-chair, laid her thin hands clasped upon his arm.

'Jaspar,' she said, imploringly, and looking down upon her he saw that tears were moistening her long lashes; 'Jaspar, for nearly eighteen years of love and kindness I thank you, from my heart of hearts. There has been very little I could do to show my gratitude, but,'—here her voice failed her slightly, and he murmured as if in deprecation.

'Much—you have done much, Clarice—

you have been true and faithful—a good mother—a never-failing friend, an amiable, and an honest-hearted woman.'

His words gave her courage, and she proceeded in a firmer voice :—

'Have I been all this, dear Jaspar? You are very good to praise me, and soon, when I am on my bed of death, the memory of those words will smooth my passage to the world of spirits. But I have yet more to say before you leave me—one last request to make—one prayer—a mother's prayer, which if you do not grant, my spirit will not rest in peace; for in my grave I shall be haunted by the thought that Zoe is a *slave*.'

She rested her bowed head upon the hands that grasped his arm, and her whole frame shook with quick convulsive sobs. He did his best to soothe her. He bore her to the couch, and spoke to her in anxious tones, using the half-forgotten petting words in which young lovers clothe their tender meaning. He told her not to fear—promised that

all was safe, and in vague words assured her that no harm in any case could happen to her child.

It sounded well enough, and the time had been when Clarice, devoted mother though she was, might have been satisfied by his deluding words. But the approach of death is often a strange sharpener of the faculties, and besides the sand in that weak woman's hour-glass was running far too low for moments to be wasted now; and therefore, she took courage, and at the risk of wearying him, held stoutly to her prayer, urging him by tears, and words that would have melted harder hearts than his, not to let another sun go down before the papers had been signed and sealed, which rescued his daughter Zoe from captivity.

At last he yielded—why she knew not—but a sudden thought appeared to strike him, and in a voice, which had in it a strange sound of exultation, he promised all she asked.

Then, and not till then, did nature sink beneath the effort she had made, but the revulsion was too powerful, and with a long, panting sigh, she sank fainting at his feet.

CHAPTER XIX.

‘I swear to you
I would not harm *her* ; I would only love *her* ;
I would not take her honour, but restore it.’

ON the following morning, long before the hour when it is customary for the indolent creole race to begin the daily routine of their somewhat unvaried existence, Charles Seymoursauntered into the verandah of Mr. Gordon’s house.

‘De ladies not dar, massa,’ said Cæsar, with his customary cringing obeisance ; ‘dar be Angy wid de water for Miss Zoe’s bath jes’ going up,’ and he pointed as he spoke to the coloured woman who, with her stealthy, cat-like step, passed slowly behind him along the passage.

‘Can she take this note for me to her mistress—to Miss Zoe, I mean,’ said Seymour, placing at the same time a dollar in Cæsar’s palm.

‘I tink so, sar—you jes’ wait a bit—I tank you, sar;’ and Cæsar, with the backward scrape of his foot on which he justly prided himself, departed on his mission.

He overtook the waiting-woman at the door of Zoe’s room, and, with a knowing wink and a roll of his white eye-balls, presented her with Seymour’s letter.

‘Dat for Miss Zoe,’ he whispered; ‘you gib it her from de ’ansome gin’l’man, Massa Seymour, dat comes sparking her.’

Angélique, who had placed the large jug of water on the floor, wiped her hands carefully before she took possession of the delicately-sea’led and folded missive. Then she scanned its appearance carefully, and finally ended by depositing it in the pocket of her apron.

‘All right,’ she said, in a low, cautious tone; ‘you go ahead, Cæsar, and tell the gentleman Miss Zoe will be sure to have it.’

Well satisfied with the success of his sable

messenger, Seymour, who was, as I hope I have made it appear, a privileged guest, lingered in the drawing-room, hoping, as the minutes were swiftly told off by the French clock upon the chimney-piece, that each succeeding one would herald the entrance of his 'ladye love,' with her sweet, fresh morning face beaming with the new-born happiness awakened in her heart by his deep love. For very long he waited there, so long that he began to fear—lovers are so apt to dread the worst—not that the slave had failed to do her mission, but that Zoe had grown cold towards him, or fearing to trust herself alone in the interview which he had prayed for, was waiting till her mother could sanction by her presence the half-dreaded *tête-à-tête*.

The time passed on wearily enough, and the disappointed lover was beginning in his wrath to meditate a retreat, when the door opened, and Mrs. Gordon, bearing on her haggard face more than ordinary evidence of

illness, entered the room leaning on her daughter's arm.

Zoe's look of surprise when she perceived him was in itself sufficient to convince her lover that by some means or other his note had never reached its destination. But had it been otherwise, and even though she had of her own accord caused him that grievous disappointment, it would have been impossible for Seymour to retain within his breast one lingering spark of anger while witnessing the quivering lip, and listening to the low, anxious voice betraying the troubled heart of his adored one.

'We are so glad to see you,' she said, placing her little hand in his; 'mamma was so very ill last night—my own, own mother! Mr. Seymour, help her—see, she will faint again! There, now she will be better' (they had placed her gently on the couch); 'she is always better lying down; and, mother, darling, we are near you—Charley and I—you remember—you do hear me—mother, I told

you all last night. Ah, Heaven! she does not hear—she cannot understand me! Charley, ring quickly, and send for Dr. Lane.'

The sick woman, by a strong effort, as it seemed, raised her hand, and motioned her to silence.

'Too late, my child, too late,' she murmured; and then, turning her dim eyes painfully to Seymour, who on the other side of the couch was leaning over her, she said more distinctly, but with evident effort, 'May I trust her to you? She says that you are true and loyal; swear to me, then, by all you hold most sacred, that you will not wrong my child.'

'Never! so help me God,' said Seymour, solemnly. But earnest as were the words, and sacred though the vow, the dying mother was not satisfied.

'Swear to me,' she said, and she spoke with an energy terrible to witness in one so near her end; 'swear to me that till the priest shall have joined your hands you will

not seek her either in her father's house, or in any other place of meeting. Swear to me that you will not strive to be alone with her, and that you will watch with steadfast and religious care, as though she were your sister, over the purity and honour of my child.'

While she spoke the words, the crimson blushes spread in quick succession over the pale cheeks, and even to the fair classic forehead of the agitated girl. Fain would she have arrested the exhortation that poured forth with such unexpected force from lips that ceased to tremble while pleading for the one object of her dearest earthly love.

'Mother,' she cried, 'be silent if you love me. This agitation is wearing you out. Have you no trust in me? none in our Father who is in Heaven? and who has promised that—that we shall not be tempted beyond what we are able to bear?' Her voice sank almost to a whisper, and with the last murmured word she fell upon her knees, and buried her flushed face in her mother's bosom.

‘Poor child — poor little girl — my own sweet, loving daughter.’

The broken voice came slowly, checked by the shortened breath, and thickly-coming tears. ‘God knows I do not doubt you—but in your very ignorance your danger lies—for—for alas! as yet you know not, child, the fatal truth—that—O God! I cannot tell her! Zoe, my darling, do not hate me when I’m gone. Do not say—even to your own heart—for if you do I feel that I shall know it in my grave—Do not say—“My mother was my bitterest enemy, and I have a right to curse her memory now.”’

To convey even the slightest idea of Zoe’s surprise at this outbreak would be impossible. At first she fixed her eyes with a wild look of inquiry on her mother’s face, doubting indeed whether she heard aright; and the next, springing to her feet, she motioned Seymour to leave them alone.

‘Go,’ she said, ‘you cannot help us. I do not understand my mother’s meaning, but it

would be better—so I think, to leave me now alone—alone with her and God.'

Clarice caught the words, low as they were spoken, and taking Seymour's hand as it rested on the arm of the couch, she held it fast.

'When all is over for me in this life,' she said very slowly, and with her eyes looking searchingly into his; 'when all is over you will tell her everything, and comfort her in this sore trouble. Tell her that my latest breath was spent in praying for my daughter's freedom. Tell her that he, her father, promised that the days when Zoe was a *slave* were passed, and *if* he fails her, if he dares to say that he has broke his word, why then *you'll* come with gold and silver in your hand and buy my girl—my precious girl—my pearl above all price—my beautiful and loving child!'

Till the end her voice was strong, but with the last fond word her strength deserted her, and her head falling forward upon Seymour's arm, she gasped as though for breath.

Zoe, whose emotion had been almost overwhelming during the time when (apparently forgetful of her presence) Mrs. Gordon had thrown her upon her lover's protection, was now at once, by the sight of her mother's evident danger, recalled from all thoughts of self, and she was endeavouring, by administering the usual remedies, to relieve the oppression under which the sufferer laboured, when a footfall, heavier than is deemed allowable in the presence of an invalid, announced the arrival of another witness to the scene.

Mr. Gordon, for it was he, advanced in evident alarm towards the couch—

'Good God!' he hastily exclaimed, 'what is all this? your mother worse? Clarice, what is it, love? See, I have brought a present for you. Lift up your head. Heavens! she does not hear me! Have you sent for Dr. Lane? Can you do nothing for her? Oh, my love! my Clarice!' and he threw himself upon the floor beside her in an agony of

grief. 'Oh, my Clarice! do not leave me thus without a farewell word of love and pardon. I have been often guilty, often cruel, but you have borne with me, my dear one, with an angel's patience, and now, when I have done your bidding—when I hold within my hand the papers that make Zoe free—'

Free! The blessed word had power, even then, to snatch her for a fleeting moment from the jaws of death. Free! why, she had dreamt of that word somewhere in a far-distant time, and now, it rang around her like the rustling of a seraph's wings, and fanned her with soft airs from heaven.

'Free,' she almost shouted, and those around her started at the clear exulting tone. 'Free! O Jaspar, God be thanked, and you—ah, let me lay my head upon your breast once more, and hail my coming freedom there, while blessing you that Zoe is no more a slave!'

He held her to his heart, and placed before her eyes, dim with approaching dissolution,

the written record she had so wildly yearned for. As she gazed, a smile, beautiful exceedingly, flickered across the dying lips, and rested there.

'Do not grieve for me,' she murmured, for I am happier than I deserve—only, when I am gone, Zoe, my child, forgive me, and—and do not leave your father if—if he wants you.'

She passed her cold, damp fingers wanderingly over his face, for her sight had nearly failed her.

'Pray for me,' she murmured, in a faint voice, 'and comfort him.'

They were her last words. Maternal love was very strong within her, but stronger still, and only to be shaken when the silver chord was broken, and death claimed her as his own, was her love for the man who had bought, deceived, and outraged her; but the memory of whose early adoration (like the scent of roses lingering in a shattered vase) clung to the lovely ruin still.

CHAPTER XX.

‘Lost, and yet living in the sun-lit cells
Of memory—that only lightsome place
Where lingers yet the day-spring of my youth :
The years of mourning for thy death are long.’

IN the evening of that day, Zoe, after vainly imploring for one more hour before the coffin lid was closed above her mother’s death-cold face for ever, laid a few freshly-gathered violets upon the breast now dead alike to joy and sorrow, and all unconscious of the shower of warm tears that fell upon the snow-white shroud.

In the morning Clarice was to be buried—buried without pomp or show in the cemetery appointed for the dead of her poor race of Pariahs, who, even in the grave, where dust shall mingle with its fellow dust, are kept apart and separated from the decaying particles of their whiter brethren.

'Throughout the night, Zoe had kept a sorrowing vigil beside the remains of the departed one, and when the morning came it found her ready, in her deep mourning garments, to follow the loved corpse to its last dismal resting-place.

The coffin, as is customary in the States, was conveyed to the negro Necropolis in a species of car, painted black, and open at the sides. A deep fringe, or curtain, of the same sombre hue, descended from the roof of the vehicle to the depth of about two feet, leaving the coffin entirely exposed to view.

This hearse, if so it may be called, was followed, at a foot's pace, by two mourning coaches, the first of which contained Zoe and her father, whilst in the latter were Dr. Lane, the kind friend and physician whose sympathy had been largely bestowed upon the weeping girl in the season of her affection; and Father Pierre, the good old priest, and, in earlier days, the confessor of the poor lost Clarice.

The burial-place was situated at a short distance from the town, among a few ancient ilexes, bare of boughs and leaves, and was enclosed by a wooden fence, half broken down, and falling rapidly into decay. The graveyard was crowded with evidences of the dead who slept below—with rotten crosses, pieces of upright plank, mounds of various size and length, with here and there monuments of more pretension and importance. There were cypress shrubs and flowering plants, too, at rare intervals, with a wreath sometimes of gold-coloured *immortels*, shining as if in mockery on the desolate graves.

But amongst all this, and predominating over all, there was a growth of weeds and briars—dense and rank, through which there trailed venomous reptiles—the moccasin snake, with its black wicked head, and crawling things innumerable.

Zoe stood beside her mother's grave, tearless and silent. There was something stern in the character of her grief; something

rebellious in the surging tumult in her breast, as she thought upon her own and her mother's wrongs—the wrongs of centuries, the wrongs of race—the fearful evils brought upon her head by one whom she would fain respect, though love for him was passed away for ever. She was not moved by pity for him, even when the hard-wrung tears of manhood fell from her father's eyes upon the coffin wherein the unconscious ashes lay. He had been her mother's *owner* and her own *master*, for she knew the truth at last, and that he might have freed her, soul and body, from the yoke, and yet he had kept her head beneath it till the hour when Death, not *he*, set the poor victim free.

Like one in a dream did Zoe listen to the burial service recited over the poor remains by kindly Father Pierre—and then, the ceremony over, she turned away with a firm step and slow towards the carriage. She passed along the irregular rows of humble graves, noticing none till her long black dress caught

in the brambles surrounding a small mound, at the head of which was placed a wooden cross.

She stopped for a moment to disengage the crape from the entangling briers, and then for the first time she perceived that she was not alone ; for, within a few yards of her, with raised hand and scowling brow stood Angélique, looking like an avenging spirit, invoking curses on the young mourner's head. Absorbed as she was by her great affliction, Zoe could not but notice the strange expression on the waiting-woman's countenance, and guessing that it might in part be occasioned by the unhealed wound dealt her in little Freddy's death, she exerted herself even at that miserable moment to speak words of comfort to the sorrowing mother.

'We are both in grievous affliction, my poor Angy,' she said. 'This is, I am sure, your lost child's grave. Let us kneel by it together ; and pray that we may meet again where there will be no more partings, and

where we shall praise God together in His Heavenly Kingdom.'

But, to the girl's surprise, Angy refused, with angry gestures, her invitation, and fixing her eyes on the distant group of which Mr. Gordon was the centre, she said, bitterly—

'The massa go in de grand coach to see the Madam buried. He pray to God by *her*—he hab de priest to say de masses for her soul; but he let little Freddy die widout a word or tear. For after all he was his chile, and as much to him as—but I beg your parding, miss—it's one that oughtenter forget that you're the missus now, and me the maid. I'll keep my place, and nebber tink of Freddy, poor little murdered Freddy, as his own father didn't care for, but let be buried like a nigger or a dog.'

She burst into a passion of tears, and when Zoe strove to comfort her, she turned from the young girl angrily. It was a painful sight that of her untamed, and all ungovern-

able grief, and Zoe almost gladly left her there, as with a last look in the direction of her mother's grave, she turned to leave the spot.

The bright sun shone upon that dreary Golgotha, and the rank herbage peeped beneath her feet, sending up a faint and sickly odour. Pendent from the trees, like long grey mourning weepers, hung the gloomy tylandsia waving in the fresh spring breeze, as slowly and silently those few sad mourners for the dead departed, leaving 'silence undisturbed to watch over the captives' graves.'

CHAPTER XXI.

‘And then I clasped my hands and looked around,
But none was near to mark my streaming eyes,
Which poured their warm drops on the sunny ground.’

A MONTH had elapsed since Gordon's unhappy mistress, released at last from the weary cares of a life of whose pleasures she had known so few, left the object of her dearest earthly care to the tender mercies of a world in which the weak find few supporters, and where ‘comfortable men,’ warmed by their own consciousness of wealth, look coldly out upon the wanderers through life's stormy night.

Zoe had been painfully impressed by the fact, demonstrated so forcibly at her poor mother's funeral, of the scornful separation decreed by law between her own race and her lover's; and almost her first act, after the

early agony of her grief had passed away, was to write a letter to the man in whose devotion she alone found comfort, urging him in words, touching in their truthful and dignified simplicity, to break off his engagement with one, a union with whom could not fail to entail upon him mortification and annoyance. To this piteous emanation from a wounded spirit, Seymour returned a prompt and unhesitating reply. He refused, in the most positive and energetic terms, to release her from her promise, vowing a love and constancy *à toute épreuve*, and declaring that nothing short of her own positive rejection (a calamity which, to own the truth, he did not seem greatly to anticipate) would deter him from putting in execution the projects he had formed for his union with the most worshipped of her sex.

As may readily be imagined, the correspondence between Zoe and her ardent lover did not end here ; but, on the contrary, it was carried on with a briskness calculated to lessen,

in some measure, the sense of desolation experienced by the lonely girl.

She trusted no one, not even Angy, with her letters; and although that skilful abigail, having recovered from her momentary attack of ill-humour, showed greater zeal than ever in her service, she received no evidence of confidence on the part of her young mistress, who, in truth, shrunk with maiden delicacy from allowing any soul that lived to become a partner in her new-born joys.

Meanwhile, and greatly to the discomfiture of Charley Seymour, the two had never met since the day when Clarice breathed her last, in the pleasant sunny room, endeared by the recollection of many blissful hours. In every letter—and their receipt by Zoe was an affair of almost daily occurrence—Seymour, utterly regardless of the dying woman's prayer, had urged the shortening of his probation, and had entreated permission to visit in her solitude her to whom he had sworn a sacred oath to guard even from himself.

But despite her lover's prayers and threats—for in his selfish passion he did threaten her with abandonment should she refuse to listen to his entreaties—Zoe, all praise to her, stood firm as a storm-beaten rock in the hard path of duty. She would be his, his only—so she wrote—but not till her first time of mourning for the mother she had lost was over, and not—but this she hardly dared to tell him—till by her father's consent she should leave him in order to depart under safe convoy to the world beyond the seas, where, if he *then* still claimed her as his bride, she would, with joy and gratitude unspeakable, unite her fate with his, to be his loving wife while life should last.

It must not be supposed that during those four slowly-passing weeks the other actors in the drama had either gone to sleep behind the scenes, or had become tired with the 'parts' which they had allotted to themselves. It is true that, with some show of respect for Gordon's sudden bereavement, society in the

bars and 'change-rooms had been for a while less busy with his name, and John L. Morse had refrained from any dangerous demonstration—from open threats or covert inuendoes. But, reposeful and drowsy as during that short interval of respite seemed the atmosphere around him, the storm-clouds were slowly gathering in the murky sky, and Destiny, the 'eyeless charioteer,' prepared his steeds to drive the unconscious victims through the tempest.

At first, and whilst the excitement attendant on his grief was fresh, Gordon seemed well content to share his sad young daughter's solitude, and hold melancholy converse with his child on the merits of her whom they had lost. But the avocation of mourning for the dead has been, since the world began, one of those duties (melancholy pleasures, as by a strange contradiction of terms they are not unfrequently called), which have by common consent fallen to the lot of the gentler sex. It is true that men can and do

suffer exceedingly when the heavy stroke first falls which leaves them solitary in their once cheerful homes—at bed and board—within doors and without. Loudly they weep and pray, but the business and the pleasure, it may be, of this work-a-day world has claims, often almost immediate, upon their time and their attention; and women, one of whose appointed offices it doubtless is to speak comfort to those that mourn, are left to weep and supplicate alone.

For many days then—for more indeed than those who knew his nature well would have deemed probable, Gordon remained in strict seclusion, unbroken even by the visits of those whom he classed amongst his friends. Tolerably patient and resigned he seemed at first, but as the days lengthened into weeks he grew less easy to be soothed or pleased—grew irritable, in short, to Zoe's infinite displeasure; for she deemed, in her true-loving heart, those quick imperious tones were an insult to the memory of her whose disem-

bodied spirit seemed to the young heart yearning for communion with the dead, to hover round her still.

The last fortnight of that dreary month was spent by Gordon at his country-house on Orange Creek Plantation. He had not thought it necessary to prepare his daughter by any gentle circumlocution for his change of plans, nor did he wish her to accompany him, he said. His intention was not to be long absent—a little plantation business to be settled, and then he would return to her.

Zoe—if the truth must be told—did not greatly miss him. She had grown, since the important changes that the past months had wrought, to live much both in the future and the past—forgetful—too forgetful, perhaps, of the present, and of the all-important duties which each day brings with it in its course.

Had she been less absorbed by her own cares, and anticipations for the future, she could have scarcely failed to notice an in-

creased air of discontent brooding over the dark countenance of Angélique. She did not know—as, indeed, how should she? that previous to Mr. Gordon's departure, Angy had spent a weary hour in fruitless entreaties that she might be allowed to accompany him to the plantation. At first she tried some feeble blandishments; having before the interview smoothed down the tight crisped bands of her black hair, and placed upon her well-anointed head its newest, brightest coiffure. She was a handsome woman in her peculiar style, as I have hinted at before, and the expanse of crinoline sat well upon her tall majestic figure; but on this occasion, despite of certain small displays, which did full credit to her coquettish instincts, the harassed man was proof against the mild temptation, and resisting every prayer and will, left Angy to her irksome attendance on the mistress whose ruin she had vowed to work.

CHAPTER XXII.

‘No foe, no dangerous pass, we heed,
Brook no delay—but onward speed
With loosened rein;
And when the fatal snare is near,
We strive to check our mad career,
But strive in vain.’

‘WELL, I guess, squire, it’s time you and I looked to do a little business again,’ was Mr. John L. Morse’s agreeable suggestion to the embarrassed Southern gentleman, on the occasion of a meeting between the two which took place (unexpectedly to both) one scorching morning, on the shady side of Poydras Street.

‘Guess, we’ve been a long spell thinking about this operation, and now we’d best conclude to act.’

Mr. Gordon, who had found himself obliged, however unwillingly, to accept the Judas-

like palm extended to him, replied with a composure he was far from feeling.

‘I regret extremely if the delay—owing to family affliction—which you have been subject to, has been the occasion of any inconvenience ; but the fact is that I have been absent from the city—took a run up-river to the plantation. I had a mind to look at some family papers before our affair was concluded, and—’

‘Found all right, I hope, squire ? Don’t doubt it at all. It comes kinder natural to folks to hanker arter the places they was raised in. Fact that, by Gawd.’

‘My object in going was, partly at least, to be prepared for this dis—this interview,’ said Gordon distantly, and without taking any notice of his companion’s remark ; ‘and, as you seem also anxious to have it over, it would, perhaps, be advisable to adjourn to some private room—your own, for instance—where there may be some chance of our coming to an understanding.’

'Curse this infernal swell-head,' muttered Morse, to himself. 'Why the h— can't he ask me to hum? I havn't had a chance to see the gal this month.'

These pleasant remarks were, of course, unheard by the Southerner to whom Morse answered aloud, and with as much courtesy as it was in his nature to assume, that he would be happy to see Mr. Gordon in the bed-room, at the St. Louis, which he had chartered for his own use.

'For it's powerful hot, ain't it?' he added. 'Gol-darned niggers weather, I reckon, and no mistake!'

The room into which Mr. John Link Morse ushered the man, whom we may safely call his victim, was situated on the third floor, and at the extremity of a long narrow passage. It was a very small apartment, into which the rays of the sun could scarcely penetrate, so thick was the coating of dust that had been accumulating on the window panes for many a by-gone year.

The view from those windows was far from a lively one, embracing as it did, only the tiled tops of houses, some tall brick chimneys, and occasional glimpses of the intensely blue sky above.

Mr. Morse preceded his visitor into the room, and still retaining his palmetto hat upon his head, invited him to be seated.

'Reckon, I feel like drinking,' said the Yankee. 'This tarnation weather makes one dry as h—; 'spose we order up a cock-tail, squire. And without waiting for an answer he applied his hand to the bell-rope, and rang it fast and furiously.

'I say you all-fired nigger,' was his opening address to the coloured lad, who in breathless haste had obeyed his summons. 'I say, you all-fired nigger, bring up two gin slings, and two brandy cock-tails, or I'll—.'

But the reader must imagine the succession of imprecations which ran glibly off the speaker's tongue, alternated as they were by explosion of other matters besides words—and

to avoid which missiles, Mr. Gordon retreated to a safe, if not a respectful distance.

In due time, but not before the delay necessary for their preparation had called forth a sequel to the former choice series of execrations, the drinks ordered by the excitable gentleman were duly placed on the dirty oilcloth-covered table, and the frightened 'boy' having made his final exit, the long-delayed conference commenced by the following characteristic remark from Gordon's hospitable entertainer :—

'Danged if I know now what you're arter, squire. Guess you wouldn't be so all-fired sarcy if you hadn't another cock to fight somewheres. I've been a looking at you and a wondering, and now I feel right down ugly, so I tell you, and won't take no more nonsense.'

'You'll take whatever's on the estate I expect,' said Gordon, with a cynical smile. 'But that's nothing to the purpose. It is your intention to foreclose, and mine (pro-

viding you don't change your mind) to leave New Orleans next month with my daughter, in order to join some friends in Germany.'

'With your darter, to jine some friends in Germany?' repeated Morse, slowly, and with an air of bewilderment. 'You're gwine to Europe, are you—and with your darter?—Well, that's sorter cool, I calculate. It makes me larfe, it does, to hear you.'

And true enough the Yankee here broke out into a kind of nervous chuckle, unpleasant to listen to, and equally disagreeable to behold, inasmuch as it disclosed certain discoloured fangs, and other unholy mysteries closely connected with the unclean national habit, in which the worthy individual was at that moment indulging.

Gordon waited till the unattractive burst of merriment had subsided, and then said, quietly,

'I see nothing remarkably entertaining in my observation—only considering, as I said before, that the vessel sails so shortly, I wish

to consult my own and Miss Gordon's convenience by—'

'You go to h—,' broke in the Yankee, unable any longer to command his temper. 'The gal's mine, and you know it—I bought her with all the rest of your mortgaged property,' he continued, almost screaming with rage and excitement. 'I bought the gal as safe as if she'd stood upon the block, and been knocked down to me before half Orleans. I've bought the gal, and by h— I'll have her.'

He had risen from his chair, and stood there literally foaming at the mouth, and with his blood-shot eyes staring wildly at his adversary. The table was between the two, and John L. Morse never knew how well for him that so it was; for the hot Southern blood had begun to boil in Gordon's veins, and the liquor he had drunk was taking effect upon his brain.

His first impulse had been to take out the sure, ready knife, and wipe out the insult to

his child with the life-blood of that cowardly claimant for her beauty. This, I say, was his first impulse; but a moment's reflection was sufficient to stay his hand, and take to that incisive weapon—his bold tongue—for vengeance.

‘Gad! man,’ he said, contemptuously, ‘have you lost your senses? You don’t suppose that I know nothing of my own business, do you? You don’t imagine that I am not aware of what’s my own, and what—G—d d—n it—may be yours some day! Why, what a fool you take me for! And so you’ve seen the list of all this precious property you hanker for, and in it, perhaps, you’ve found the name of a young—. Hell’s curses on you, man,’ he exclaimed, suddenly interrupting himself; ‘you thought to have all—did you? You thought to have the finest girl in all the States for nothing—did you? Ha, ha, ha! Well, look again, and then you’ll find that to the accursed brute whose shoes you stand in I never mortgaged that young lady. *Her*

name is not in the bond, sir. She was away in Europe when that list of property was made; and since I gave my girl her freedom no man alive dares lay a hand upon her, "and claim her as his own."

CHAPTER XXIII.

‘ The green lands cradled in the roar
Of western waves, and wildernesses—
Peopled and vast, which skirt the oceans,
Where morning dyes her golden tresses—
Shall soon partake our high emotions.’

WHAT is freedom? And who among us, from the highest to the lowest, may with truth aver that he or she can boast that gift of often doubtful good?

‘ An quisquam est alius liber, nisi ducere vitam
Cui licet, ut voluit?’

And if this be so, and if there be any truth in the old Roman’s solution of the great enigma, then may we not be allowed to ask, and still more emphatically than before, who in this world is free?

On the afternoon of the day when two men, heated by passion and the fumes of

ardent spirits, dared to make a pure young girl a subject of barter and dispute, the object of their hateful discussions lay in her hammock, beneath the mosquito curtains, pondering on the query with which this chapter is headed. Pondering, too, with such exceeding earnestness that a desire seized her to test the pleasures of such liberty as God had given her.

‘Why do I lie here? she thought, ‘in solitude and weariness, when the whole world is busy out of doors, and when—’

But instead of following the young girl in her soliloquy, we will relate the simple fact that Zoe, yielding to a kind of uncontrollable impulse, sprang from her swinging couch, and ringing for Angélique, desired that her horses might be ordered.

‘For I will ride to-day, Angy,’ she said; ‘I will go out into the busy world again and try to chase away the gloom that weighs me down.’

The pretty Arab was brought round, the

very Sultan stigmatized by Seymour as 'too much' for the light hand of his young mistress, and who now pranced before her with his long neck arched, and neighing as though for joy to see her once again.

There was no eager lover now to take her little foot in his broad palm, and place her with exceeding care upon the saddle; and Zoe, as she stood beneath the wide verandah, and felt the dreary void, sighed heavily under the concealing crape of her thick mourning veil.

The month was April now, and the heat almost oppressive to those who had not been accustomed to the semi-tropical climate of the lower valley of the Mississippi. Through a small portion of the sun-scorched streets the girl was forced to take her way ere she could arrive at the place to which she was bound—namely, a grassy ride in the neighbourhood of the Shell Road, from which gay place of resort, equestrians, in search of shade and quiet, were in the habit of diverging.

Notwithstanding the intensity of the afternoon heat, the streets were, as usual, thronged with passengers, amongst whom the representatives of the negro race (both sexes included) were neither the least numerous nor conspicuous. There, in all shades of colour, were they to be seen, from the coal-black negro, with woolly hair and features of the unmitigated African type, to the Quadroon with her yellow skin, and rippling hair, and the white slave, fair as the fairest importations from Georgia or Circassia.

Impossible to see a people, to all outward appearance at least, more contented with their lot, than those same 'wretched slaves,' and Zoe, who since her enlightenment on the subject of her own recent escape from a state of bondage, had dwelt long and anxiously on the great question of slavery, looked with newly-awakened feelings of curiosity at the victims of the 'peculiar institution.'

On they came, apparently far exceeding in numbers the whites who kept them in that

state of thralldom. On they came—the young 'Orleans' black-dandy—the 'city clerk'—(the last word is invariably pronounced according to its orthography) hired out by his owner at high wages, and who had indulged regardless of expense his taste for the magnificent in costume. On he swaggers, swinging his gilt-headed cane, and jingling the showy mass of 'charms' in cheap French jewellery that dangles from his guard chain.

But if the sober-minded passer-by is struck with astonishment at the sight of such a large development of dandyism, what must be his surprise and admiration whilst witnessing the gorgeous personal decorations of the weaker sex? To say that the coloured female population, taken *en masse*, are positively dazzling to the eye, is to give but a faint idea of the effect produced by the love of fashion and of gaudy colours displayed on a fine sunshiny day in the New Orleans streets. Such bonnets, and *sorties de bal*! Such artificial flowers, of all hues and patterns! And then the

crinolines, short, and spreading far beyond those adopted by their less-aspiring mistresses. All this cannot fail to impress an inexperienced bystander with the conviction that a portion at least of these sons and daughters of bondage are not destitute of some of the consolations appertaining to the free. Zoe, preoccupied though she was with her own private and especial cares, could scarcely fail to be struck with these peculiarities attendant on a system, the evils of which bore in many ways so hardly on her individual case; for the unrelenting hatred, and undisguised contemptuous loathing, said to be felt by white men to those of her race, was a subject of continual bitterness to a heart proud as it was tender, and independent, even in the midst of its entire self-abnegation to those she loved.

In the North, the period when the nature of the '*institution*' was almost a mystery to her, she had undergone, as we have seen, in her own person, a rude awakening to the fact

that (what may be called) moral cruelties can be practised with impunity by men, on un-offending women; and that the 'gentlemen(?)' of the *Free* States, who pride themselves on their chivalrous devotion to the gentler sex, are capable, when their absurd and brutal prejudices are called into action, of deeds of atrocity hardly to be rivalled by the physical barbarities inflicted by the least merciful of the Southern slave-drivers.

With this impression strongly engraven on her mind it was almost a consolation to the lonely girl, when, as she rode slowly onward, her eyes rested momentarily on the showily-attired coloured population, as they walked briskly along the side-walk with cheerful faces and with jaunty steps. They seemed to have not the slightest sense of their own inferiority, nor did they appear at all impressed by the superior privileges enjoyed by their white brethren around them.

She did not know, poor child, that in the very depth of their degradation, and in their

apparent conviction that their slavery would last for ever, rested their best security against insult and oppression ; and that national and natural antipathy was laid to sleep, when the question of equality appeared one little likely to be ever raised in their behalf.

On the Shell Road at last—with flushed face and burning brow—while Sultan, fresh from his long rest, and fretted by the sound of horses' hoofs behind him, added to her discomfort by straining at her hand in his eagerness for a gallop.

On the Shell Road, at last, with the Arab launched into a canter, and not a glance turned for a single instant to the right hand or the left. On one side ran the dull canal, teeming with hideous alligators, and on which slow, heavy-laden barges crept along towards the city or the lake ; whilst on her left stretched far and wide, but still so dense that only for a few darkened yards could the eye penetrate its gloom—the forest of the 'dismal swamp' lying below the level of the artificial

road. In it grew the long, straight, graceless cottonwood tree, the standing pool mantled with a green coat of slime rising often far above its roots, while frequently were to be seen the strange stump-like mounds called cypress knees, mixed with an undergrowth of thickly-growing shrubs.

Zoe had not ridden many yards along the crowded road when her attention was arrested by the sudden stopping near her of an advancing horseman, and, looking up, she found herself accosted, with a courteous raising of his hat, by Davenport Seymour.

Her first impulse, after returning his salutation, was to continue on her way, without allowing him the choice of joining her in her ride. She did not feel in the mood for companionship, and her recent loss would be excuse enough, she thought, for her avoidance of him ; but, in coming to this resolution, she had reckoned without the knowledge of Davenport's preconceived determination to turn his horse in the direction she was pursu-

ing, and thus enjoy an hour's *tête-à-tête* with his brother's *fiancée*.

'Too hot a day, Miss Gordon,' was his opening observation, 'for one so unacclimatized as you are to be abroad. Let us make haste to seek the shelter of the trees; for, if I mistake not, this crowd is anything but agreeable to you, and I know of a short cut which will lead us directly on the turf, and to where the tallest and most spreading *illexes* are growing.'

She had placed her little hand, encased in its delicate black gauntlet, into the outstretched palm of Davenport Seymour. He pressed it with a gentle, silent sympathy; and then they rode on side by side together. They passed the race-course—a poor affair enough it would have looked to men accustomed to the well-ordered, smoothly-kept turf of European countries. There were two negro jockeys weighing for a two-mile race between a pair of 'cocktails,' their drunken owners were standing by, whilst a

laughing, jeering set of Louisianian swells were lounging round the gate by which Davenport Seymour and his beautiful companion cantered, on their way to the green shade they longed for.

Perhaps the sporting men, who probably felt as important in their way as the most spirited backer at Tattersall's of the Derby 'favourite,' indulged in a ribald jest or two at Zoe's expense, as Sultan, with his long, easy thorough-bred step, bore his lovely burthen proudly on. It may be, too, that Davenport, the husband of a few months only, did not escape the witticisms which bachelors, vain of their own freedom, are apt to launch against a new-made Benedict. But if this were the case, the 'fun' was lost upon the objects of it, for the two equestrians never looked towards the loafing, *whittling* specimens of the 'Orleans' *beau monde*; but dashed on bravely, with the burning sun above them, and the small shells grinding into impalpable dust beneath their horses' feet. For two-

thirds of the whole distance to which the road extended they rode almost in silence, nor was it till they reached a spot marked by a large ilex, adorned with innumerable mossy beards pendent from every bough, that they checked their speed, and Davenport breathed a sigh of relief.

'Thank God,' he said, 'that I have you safe out of that pandemonium! It was better to ride for it though—was it not?—with such a welcome shade as this before us.'

A welcome shade indeed! Light, springing turf beneath their horses' feet; trees, tall and spreading, with festoons of the wild vine, and many a varied creeper swinging from and intertwining each other, even to the very summits of the largest evergreens amongst the goodly groups.

'Delightful, is it not?' said Zoe; 'I am so glad you have brought me here. I have often heard of this ride, but have been afraid to venture here alone, or rather with only Sam as my protector.'

‘Quite right. You could not be too careful; for though, thank Heaven! we Southerners are not disgraced by the unmanly outrages offered in the North to ladies who—’

Seeing that he hesitated, Zoe came to his relief by saying in her quick, ardent way—

‘Mr. Seymour, please, I entreat of you, not to spare me. The time was, and that not so very long ago, when I was utterly in the dark as to the disgrace which in this country, and perhaps in every other,’ she added with a heavy sigh, ‘attaches itself to my birth. I believe you are my friend. I know you are the kindest of brothers to him—to Charley; and—I trust—nay, I implore you to believe that, did I think I should entail disgrace upon him, I would—but perhaps he has already told you that I have urged him to forget me, and have promised to do my best not to—not to break my heart.’

The ready tears—for, as the reader must be already aware, Zoe was anything but strong-minded—rose to the girl’s eyes, and

struggled with a faint, beautiful smile, which rose to her lips as she waited for the answer, which was not long in coming.

'He has told me of your generous disinterestedness,' Davenport replied. 'In that respect Charley has had no secrets from the elder brother, whom he has been accustomed to look upon as a friend.'

'But you,' asked the impetuous girl, 'you and his near relations—his parents, and that darling little girl, his sister—will you all despise me?—all wish that Charley had been dead,' she continued bitterly, 'before he had taken to his heart the wretched coloured girl who has brought such shame upon their house?'

'You do us all injustice,' Davenport answered, with a gentle gravity, which checked Zoe's emotion. 'You do us great injustice if you think that the fractional drop of coloured blood which you can claim would prejudice us against one so formed to excite our affection and respect. I cannot, however, say that an entire trust in your making Charley happy

will quite efface the memory of the fact that the day of his marriage with you, must—at least so long as law and custom remain unchanged—see him an exile from home and from our country.'

'I had not thought of this,' said Zoe, sadly, and after a lengthened pause. 'I have been so little in this land, and find it hard to understand such cruel prejudices.'

'Cruel indeed ! and on what original causes founded it is hard to say. Did it commence when—to a year almost—three centuries ago, one of the greatest of England's monarchs associated herself for piratical purposes with the first slaver, John Hawkins of infamous notoriety, who stole the Africans from their homes to satisfy his lust of gain? A worthy company, was it not?—her Britannic Majesty and the slave-dealer ; and between them they made some good operations, if history belies them not.'

'But,' said Zoe, in a low tone, 'England was generous at last, and freed the people

from their bondage ; while the Pharaohs of this country, often as they are entreated, refuse to let the people go.'

'And almost better so,' rejoined Davenport, 'than to turn them over unprepared for the blessing of freedom, either to the guidance of their own passions, or the tender mercies of the North, who, while heaping insult on their free negroes, and not seldom leaving them to starve, spend their time in preaching in favour of abolition, or in listening to the exaggerated, and often utterly untrue, reports of the miseries endured in the South by the black and coloured population.'

'I suppose it's partly their colour that makes them so detested and despised?' said Zoe, musingly.

'In all likelihood that was originally the main cause of the prevalent feeling, but why this should be the case cannot be satisfactorily explained even by the most zealous advocates of the "institution." The mere colour of the skin can be accounted for on scientific

principles that entirely nullify the idea that—'

'That *we* are a race between mankind and monkeys,' broke in Zoe, emphatically, for Davenport was evidently stumbling over the recollection that his fair auditress was one of those whose condition they were occupied in discussing—'A race created by God to be, to the very end of time, slaves to the white man, inasmuch as we have not souls like theirs, or hearts, or feelings, or perhaps a sense of right and wrong. God help us! But please to tell me what science says about our skins, that I may know the best and worst that can be urged concerning us.'

Davenport smiled, although, in truth, he could not help in some degree regretting the turn which the conversation had taken. 'An apology is often worse than an affront,' he said, 'especially when the affront is obviously unintentional. However, as regards the efforts of science to throw light upon this knotty question, I will, at the risk of boring you,

sum them up in as few words as possible. In the substance known as human skin, are found three membranes ; and that which causes the difference (as regards colour) between the white man and the black is not, as some suppose, the possession by the latter of a separate and particular membrane, but simply that a colouring substance is found between the two outermost cuticles—a substance which, in its nature, exists in every human being alike, but which differs in quantity according to the degree of heat or cold in which God has placed each separate race.'

'I understand—and that in the African race it is superabundant, while among Northern nations there can be but a limited portion of this very objectionable taint.'

'Do not call it a taint. We are all liable to its increase, if we sojourn long enough in tropical countries, and I, for one, do not understand how the mere fact of the negro being of a darker hue than the larger portion

of the human race should be an argument for slavery. Really, it would, in my opinion, be almost as arbitrary to declare that the red-headed and the blondes in Europe had a right to consider the dark-browed of our species as their inferiors, and, therefore, their natural property.'

Zoe laughed.

'Perhaps,' she said, 'the national prejudice may in some degree be accounted for by the poor negroes' ugliness, for certainly, they are not by any means a race of Venuses and Apollos. But, as you justly say, mere physical ungainliness ought to be no reason for the continuance of this unnatural "institution," and—'

'How astonishing is the improvement,' broke in Seymour, who had apparently, while following the thread of his own reflections, almost forgotten the presence of his companion. 'How astonishing is the improvement of the African race when it is tempered by the slightest admixture of white blood! And

this in itself should give the lie to the suggestion that the negroes are a race inferior and apart. The laws of nature would forbid the extension of the hybrids, were the two breeds not essentially the same, and capable of improvement by amalgamation. What beauty of form and feature also do we not see amongst what is called the coloured population! What proofs that if—but I am plunging headlong into the most intricate of subjects, without even giving you the choice of whether or not you are willing to follow me through the labyrinth.'

'Pray do not apologize,' said Chérie, with one of her sweetest smiles, 'for I clearly have been the aggressor. I have so long been anxious to hear truth about this matter; so anxious to learn the extent of good men's prejudices against us, and also on what foundation those prejudices rest, that—'

'Excuse me for interrupting you, but truth is in this matter even more difficult than usual to arrive at, inasmuch as self-interest

lies at the bottom of self-deception, and, therefore, of public deception. And how, too, is it possible to reason with men who not only have sugar and cotton lands to cultivate, but *hands* wherewith to produce the number of barrels and bales per acre requisite to realize a fortune ?'

'I understand,' said Chérie; 'but will you excuse me if I ask you one more question, and that is—How much am I to believe of the stories circulated by the Abolitionists regarding the fearful cruelties practised in the plantations on the poor helpless blacks? Are they beaten and burned alive? Are they tortured and tormented? And if so, how is it that we see so many cheerful faces round us; and why do so many remain with their owners even when it is in their power to purchase, or otherwise obtain, their freedom?'

'Because,' answered Davenport, 'there are two sides to every picture; because human nature is composed of different materials;

and because each side is interested in making a case for itself. That there are instances of great individual hardship, there can be no doubt; and, equally true is it, that even the extremely mild laws enacted for the protection, and the feeding of the poor blacks, are very little regarded. The overseers on distant plantations also, and especially where the master is an absentee, are very hard upon the negro, for, as their own reputation for efficiency depends on the number of bales of cotton, or barrels of sugar, made during the season, it is their interest to overtask, drive, and often flog the slaves unmercifully. At the same time, the condition of the *stock*, and their fitness for work, is another test of an overseer's merits; and this being the case, is it probable that he would risk his reputation by wantonly destroying lives so important, or in any way rendering less valuable the property of his employer?'

'And,' rejoined Chérie, 'a similar argument holds good with regard to the owner

himself; at the same time, there must be many instances of cruelties inflicted in sudden passion, for, according to the advertisements for runaway negroes and negresses, how maimed and marked the poor creatures often are.'

'Too true; nor can we wonder at this, when we reflect that the slaves, from the absence of any exciting motive, such as the ennobling one of hope, are usually provokingly idle, and that the natural impulse of every human being when irritated is, from boyhood upwards, to give vent to his anger and disgust by the infliction of bodily suffering on one weaker than himself. There are laws, as I said before—dead-letter laws, if I may so call them—which visit the white man with death should he take the life of a negro without cause. For torturing, except with the lash, the said helpless individual too, the master is liable to fine, but there is no punishment awarded for any amount of flogging, deserved or otherwise, to which the

unhappy victims of caprice and tyranny may have been subjected. The system, my dear Miss Gordon, is a bad, inexpedient, expensive, and disgraceful one. But I believe as regards the aggregate of happiness of our four millions of slaves, it will be found that on comparing their condition with that of the poor in other countries, the advantage will generally lie with our greatly-pitied bondsmen. But, even taking into consideration how greatly the lot of many is to be envied by the white slaves in Europe, I see no excuse for, or extenuation of, an institution, which degrades alike the owner and his living chattel, and places our country so deplorably low in the scale of civilized nations.'

By the time that Davenport had ceased speaking, the shades of night were beginning to close round the still busy city, the environs of which the equestrians were approaching by a different route from that which Zoe had taken when she set forth on her expedition.

But little more conversation passed between them till they stopped their horses at Mr. Gordon's door—Davenport then wished his companion a kind and cordial 'good-night,' and Chérie, by the light of the rising moon, passed between the rows of tall oleanders into the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

‘ Forget the dead, the past ? O yes
There are ghosts that may take revenge for it ;
Memories that make the heart a tomb,
Regrets which glide through the spirits’ gloom,
And with ghastly whispers tell
That joy once lost is pain.’

‘ I AM very sorry, Zoe, you are not pleased ;
but it can’t be helped now, my dear, and
you must make the best of it.’

He did not know, surely he could not
guess the torture that he made her suffer.
He was her father. Was not that enough
to save her from the wanton pointing at her
heart of arrows sharp and poisonous as the
deadly weapons hurled from a barbarian’s
hand ?

It was some such hope as this—namely,
that he, the being to whom she owed her birth,

must perforce have mercy on her, which dulled the keenness of those cruel words, and made poor Zoe more than half believe he said them but to try her.

They had met at breakfast on the morning after Chérie's pleasant ride with the brother of the man she loved. It had been an exercise of mind and body that had done her good, and she had risen from her bed invigorated and refreshed. Gordon had not returned home till long after his daughter had retired to rest, and when he did so, it was with a flushed feverish face, and steps that were not quite so steady, when they trod the narrow path between the pale pink blossoms as the young girl—his child's had been—some hours before.

She had waited for him an hour or more, before he descended to the morning meal; and when he did he hardly looked at her, but pouring out a full tumbler of iced burgundy, drank it off at once.

Chérie looked at him with surprise, for

his hand shook almost convulsively, and his face was wan and haggard.

'You will have a visitor to-day,' he said, in a low husky voice, and still without once glancing at his daughter; 'a visitor whom I must beg you will be civil to—John Lincoln Morse. We haven't seen him lately, and he complains that we've—we've neglected him.'

'Neglected him,' repeated Chérie, in surprise. 'My dear papa! We never knew him well; hardly at all—indeed—and I never could endure even to speak to him. Why does he come here? But you will be at home of course. You will not leave me alone to—to—'

'My dear Zoe, it is time that this kind of young-lady-like prudery should have an end. You are quite old enough to know that when girls come to your time of life, eighteen or so, marriage comes, too, as a matter of course; and, well—I suppose, you'll go on blushing about it if I wait till to-morrow

morning, so I had better speak out at once, and say that I have accepted John Link Morse's proposal for your hand.'

Had Gordon suggested to his daughter the advisability of her throwing herself into the canal where the loathsome alligators are ever on the watch for prey; or had he, with an equal amount of fatherly consideration, proposed that she should exchange (as a domestic pet) her harmless mocking-bird for the companionship of a deadly rattlesnake, Zoe could hardly have been more wonder-stricken than she was by these concluding words.

Even to answer them seemed almost an act of supererogation; for, little as her father was given to jesting, she could not in this instance believe him to be in earnest. There are horrors so great that they pass the bounds even of possibility, and of these Chérie conceived the present to be one.

But still, questionable as was the *plaisanterie*, and repulsive as was Mr. John L. Morse as a

subject for conversation, Zoe, feeling that some response was expected of her, forced a smile to her lips, while she said, in a voice a little altered from its accustomed calmness—

‘My dear father, forgive me for my stupidity, and pardon me for asking the meaning of your words. Their very sound is strange to me, and it is odious even in a jest to hear the name of such a man as that coupled with mine.’

‘Odious enough, I grant you,’ said Gordon, whose mouth was full of Périgord pie—‘odious enough; and as to its being a joke, I only wish it were one. Why, child, you don’t conclude it’s altogether pleasant to give my daughter to a disgusting Yankee fellow, with no more manners than a hog, and no more feeling—so help me, Gawd, as I believe it—than a gar-fish? But,’ he added, suddenly checking his rising passion, ‘the brute is rich, I tell you—rich enough to buy us all up; and, as you ought to know by this time, it

isn't every white man that's willing to marry a girl with a drop of black blood in her veins.'

'Not every one,' said Zoe shyly, but still with a certain proud raising of her head, which was not entirely lost upon her father; 'not every one—but, dear papa, you may have seen—I ought, though, to have had no secrets from you—Mr. Seymour—Charles Seymour—he does not share these cruel prejudices, and—and—we are engaged to be married.'

Gordon, on hearing this, looked up suddenly in his daughter's face, whilst a gleam of what might be almost called hope flashed across his own.

'He will marry you, will he? That sounds well, but I fear it is all nonsense, girl, unless, indeed, he's got a million dollars; for to that tune I'm bound to dance to John L. Morse's fiddling. No, it's all nonsense, girl; and when he comes to-day, as come he will, you'd best be civil to him. We can't afford to quarrel with the scoundrel, though I tell you, girl, that

if I only had him half-a-dozen paces off, with a Colt's revolver in my hand, the blackguard's life would not be worth a moment's purchase—not a moment's,' he slowly repeated through his set teeth, as with a dark and demoniacal expression on his face, which backed well the assertion he had made, he lounged out of the room.

Not a minute after his departure did Zoe waste in useless meditation, or in self-pity, which could neither console nor assist her. The time for dreams was over for ever, and the moment for action had arrived. There was but one to whom in this emergency she could apply for aid, and whose heart would, as well she knew, respond at once to her entreaty. Zoe regretted now the time that had been lost, the prayers she had disregarded, and the attempts to be reunited with the man whom in her heart she worshipped, which she had so often and so successfully foiled.

But regrets like these were useless now;

and if, as was indeed the case, she had more than once roused her lover into wrath by seeming coldness, the words in which were clothed her urgent entreaty for his presence made ample amends for any former shortcomings.

‘Forgive me’—she wrote—‘forgive me, my own dear love, for what may have looked to you like fear and coldness. I had been so unhappy, so broken-hearted for my mother’s loss, and her dear words came back to me by day and night, and made me fear even for your sake to disobey her. But that is over now, my Charley. I mean that there is something dreadful going on, which makes all but this fearful danger seem of little import. I have no time for more, and hardly even do I know if I write sense, so great is my distress. But come to me at once, dear Charley. Let nothing hinder you from this, and do not think me forward and unmaidenly, dear love. You will not when you hear the whole, and learn that you alone can save me.’

This note was despatched by a trusty messenger, namely, old Sam the groom ; and ere an hour had elapsed it was answered in person by the individual to whom it was addressed.

CHAPTER XXV.

‘Never! ’Tis certain that no hope is—none?
No hope for me, and yet for thee no fear;
The hardest part of my hard task is done;
Thy words assure me that I am not dear.’

HE did not rush to meet her eagerly, but came forward with a courteous gravity that sent a chill to Zoe’s heart. She could not know—for as yet the mystery of men’s passions (made up of pride and vanity and sensualism) was a sealed book to her—how often her replies to his wild outbreaks of entreaty had mortified and disappointed him. Could she but have seen him (and seeing, looked into his heart) alone, at midnight, with the lamplight gleaming on his forehead, and bending over the paper that was soon to touch the hand of her he idolized, she would have understood his present (seeming) coldness better.

Could she but have known the hours he lay awake counting up the tedious minutes, till the time should come when she would see him, and seeing, make amends for all his previous disappointments—she would have blamed herself, not him—while wondering, woman like, at the superhuman patience that had made him bear with her in such a Christian spirit!

‘You have sent for me at last,’ he said, ‘and I am only too happy to be of service to you.’

He drew a chair, not very near her, as he spoke, and looked at her pale face furtively.

What a sweet revenge it was! He saw that he was torturing her, but knew so well that at a word or look of love, his victim would flutter to him like a wounded bird, or a poor faithful dog whose master, in a moment of caprice, has spurned with harshness from his side.

Zoe, poor child, felt sorely frightened and perplexed — astonished, too, and as one

aroused most roughly from a dream of love and happiness, Was this the meeting, then, to which, in spite of maidenly reserve, she had looked forward through each hour of the day, and in the wakeful watches of the silent night? Surely it could not be! Why, in her fancy she had been—the foolish, loving child—within his arms ere this—had laid her head upon his bosom, and been soothed there as a petted infant to its rest. The tears came brimming to her eyes as the vain visions swam before her, but she sent back the idle drops to the wounded heart from whence they sprang; and pride coming to her aid, she did her woman's duty bravely.

‘I sent for you—yes—I am sorry that I troubled you, but I have no other friend, and—’

She could not go on, for a convulsive sob rose in the fair, round throat, and in her efforts to suppress it she broke down entirely.

He rose at once, and bending over her, took one small, trembling hand in his.

'Zoe,' he faltered, 'you have deceived me. I had pictured you to myself as strong in mind and nerves—able for your own protection, and wholly independent of my love and care. Tell me this is not so. Tell me in what I can promote your happiness and—child—child—do not tremble so—I cannot bear to hear you sob. Poor little girl! My own sweet, gentle Zoe.'

She was in his arms now, and folded to his breast, panting like a frightened deer whose place of refuge has been gained at last.

'Charley,' she gasped, as soon as she could free herself from the caresses which he lavished on her; 'Charley, I am so very miserable. You do not—cannot guess the awful misfortunes which are hanging over us. My father—he has told me to-day—not two hours ago, that he has promised—Ah, it is such a shameful thing to say—he has promised that I shall marry the man whom in all the world I should most hate, did he not

seem so far beneath all sentiments but those of unspeakable contempt.'

'And this man is?'—said Seymour, endeavouring, but with ill-success, to hide his emotion.

'The man my father calls a low-born Yankee, and always seemed till now to look upon as something very bad and vile. Yes, vile, dear Charley, though the word is ugly; for, from all that I can learn, he trades upon some hold he has obtained over my poor father, and—'

'You are to be the sacrifice,' interrupted Seymour, passionately. 'By heavens! what a cursed plot! I have already heard something of this tale, for men have said within my hearing, that Gordon was used up—had not a leg to stand upon. Cant terms, you understand, for having run in debt and lived beyond one's income. They more than hinted, too, that both his country properties were mortgaged to the utmost of their value, and that—yes, I see it all, now, this Yankee has

bought up the mortgages in order to get you in his power, and force you to be his.'

'Force me!' said Zoe, indignantly. 'He will not find that quite so easy as he expects. Force me! Impossible! Why, Charley, it makes me shudder almost with anger against you, to hear you say the word so calmly. To think that such a man should dare, even in a dream, to think of me—should dare to speak my name, the name of one whom you have honoured with your love. Oh, Charley, speak to me—why do you look so strange? Why do you let go my hands, and look as if some evil still more dreadful than I have named were hovering near us?'

'Because—but listen to me, darling, for this is no child's play we have to speak of, but a great stake to risk our all for. The time has come, my Chérie, when you must choose between my love and the foolish prejudices—forgive me for calling them so—which for a whole month past have stood between us and our happiness. The time

has come when you must trust me, love, and leaving all for me—friends (thank God they are not many), father, home, and country, must sail with me to happier lands, to lands—if such there be—where freedom is something better than a name, and where, before the altar of your God, I can declare you mine till death shall part us !’

He threw his arms around the pliant form which, with a gentle violence, he had raised up from a sitting posture ; and clasping her to his breast, held her enfolded there. She strove in vain to free herself from his strong grasp, as there with lip to lip, and heart to heart, he whispered, between each passionate caress, his prayer to her to follow him.

‘One word—one little word, my angel ! For are you not my own—my bride—my own adored one ? Say. Promise that this night shall see you in a place of safety—a place which I will tell you of, and to-morrow a ship sails for Hâvre, dearest, and we—God ! It is too much happiness—nor can I leave

you now, it is too great a trial. Come, my precious love! One word—one little word, only to say that we need part no more.'

He held her from him for a moment, gazing into her love-lighted eyes with all the eagerness of passion. He smoothed the hair from her pure forehead with his cold-shaking fingers, for the warm blood of his five-and-twenty summers had rushed wildly back to heart and brain, and wrought in him a momentary madness. He did not *then*—no, not for a single instant, doubt that the sweet lips, fevered by his half-frantic kisses, would refuse to grant him all he asked, and so he waited for a few moments patiently, gloating on her peerless beauty, and gathering up, while life and memory should remain, her image in his breast.

She spoke at last, two words—two only—with quivering lips and lowered eyelids—spoke them very softly, but they were loud enough to turn his heart to stone.

'I cannot.'

He almost flung her from him, and (for he felt no pity for her sorrows then) something akin to a deep curse burst from his white lips. The revulsion of feeling was too strong, and at that moment his fierce love took the traitor form of hate.

'You *cannot*! Say the words again! Say why you lured me here—why you gave hopes you never, in your false, cold woman's heart, intended should be realized? Speak, for I will waste my time no longer, grovelling at your feet. I will not be your toy, the object of your ridicule, to be called on and whistled off as if I were a dog to do your bidding.'

'Spare me,' she murmured, piteously. 'Think of my mother's words—my dying, tender mother! You loved her once, and will respect her wishes now; for Charles, it may be that from her rest above she sees us, and prays God to save and comfort me.'

'And if she does? Good God, is this a thought to come between two hearts and

sever them for ever? For it is for ever,' he continued, raising his hand threateningly towards the painfully agitated girl. 'For I swear, by the great God who made us both, that if you now refuse to trust me, if you linger here to listen to—'

'Oh, Charley! How cruel! You cannot think—'

'Hush! and hear me speak my vow. If then, I say, you choose to sacrifice my happiness to the memory of the dead, I leave you now for ever, leave you to—'

'Oh, Charley, give me time to think,' she said, imploringly. 'You would not leave me—oh, no! Say—Swear that you will not leave me to my wretchedness.'

'I will not stay to be your laughing-stock. I will not remain within your reach to suffer as I have done this day; but since you ask it,' he said, in a somewhat softened tone; 'since you ask for time, for love and reason to hold converse, why, take it; but not long will I endure suspense—only till the sun

sets this night will I remain in waiting for your answer, and if before the clock strikes nine I have no message from you—why, I will be gone, and—but no—you will not let me turn to other hearts for comfort? You will not fail me at the last, my Zoe? But hark! I hear loud voices in the verandah! Your father's, doubtless, and that man's. One kiss, my Zoe—another—and, O Love! remember that it depends on you alone, whether—'

He had no time for more, for the sound of voices grew more near, and he had barely a moment to escape by the door that led into the vestibule, when Gordon, accompanied by John Link Morse, made his appearance in the room.

The brilliant April sun streamed in through the Venetian blinds, the love-birds twittered gaily on their little perches, and, from the hundred blossoms of the magnolia-trees outside, there rose a perfect gush of fragrance. Spring had come with its fresh buds of

promise, and the voice of hope seemed whispering everywhere, save to the young heart heavy with its early sorrows, and cold with a dark presentiment of evil days to come.

CHAPTER XXVI.

‘For she was beautiful—her beauty made
The bright world dim, and everything beside
Seemed like the fleeting image of a shade.’

JOHN LINK MORSE had not improved in appearance since he had first struck Miss Gordon as being, both in person and manner, the least endurable of the male creation with whom she had ever come in contact. He was attired in a kind of loose frock or paletot, made of some unbleached cotton fabric, and his nether garments, a trifle short for his lengthy limbs, were not remarkable either for perfection of cut, or whiteness of hue. In deference to Miss Gordon, or, perhaps, it was merely a matter of comfort and convenience, John Link pushed back his shabby hat on his entrance, showing thereby a tangled mass of unkempt hair, looking for

all the world as if a Natchez tornado had passed through it since last the dirty pocket-comb had done its daily work.

‘Powerful warm, ain’t it?’ he said, at the same time extending a moist ungloved hand to Zoe, who, but that she knew her father’s eyes were fixed upon her, would have refused the unwelcome courtesy. ‘The Almighty hot sun I’ve felt, I reckon, since I came down-river, and I’ve got a head-ache a heap along of it.’

And the monster, taking from his pocket a coarse handkerchief, of a hue a shade darker than his outer garments, wiped his narrow forehead with it tenderly.

‘Very hot,’ responded Gordon, speaking for his daughter, whose continued silence was beginning to be very embarrassing to him—‘anything you would like to take?’

‘Well, I don’t mind if I do liquor. Some of your high concentrated hard cider—what we city folks call sham-pane—that ain’t slow to wind a fellar up, I tell you.’

'A bottle of champagne? We'll have it at once. You'll excuse me while I go and make certain that they bring us the right sort.' And almost before his hapless daughter was aware of his intention to leave her alone with their distasteful visitor, Mr. Gordon had left the room.

John Link was not naturally a bashful man, but whether the heat had affected his nerves, or that sundry brandy smashes and other complicated drinks had quelled his natural impudence, certain it is, that when he found himself *tête-à-tête* on that bright spring morning with a girl whose every look betrayed the repugnance which she felt towards him, his courage failed him, and for the space of a minute, he would have thankfully hailed the immediate return of the planter from his hospitable errand.

Gladly too—most gladly—would Zoe have left her detested admirer to the enjoyment of his own society, and the 'concentrated hard cider,' on which he had evidently fixed so

large a portion of his affection ; but besides that, she stood in no little fear of the father, who, in *law*, had so lately been her owner too. A few minutes' reflection had convinced her of the expediency of temporizing with the enemy, and by this means becoming, if possible, acquainted with some of the hidden projects against her peace.

She remained therefore where she was, seated on the sofa, which had been her mother's death-bed, and with her hand passed through the collar that encircled the thick burly throat of her faithful dog (Prospero by name), but the which appellation was usually abbreviated into Piero. Rendered more adventurous by her silence, Morse took a few steps in advance, rather unsteadily it must be owned, for he had done the brandy smashes no injustice in accusing them of contributing to his matutinal discomfort.

'Well, that's a new kink, I reckon,' he said, 'that ar' dog,' and emboldened by love and the liquor that he delighted in, John L.

Morse seemed about to pat the broad bold forehead of Zoe's faithful guardian.

'You had better not touch him,' she said, in her low musical voice; 'he is not always kind to strangers, and I might not be able to restrain him if he should turn upon you.'

'Guess he won't show his sarse to me,' responded Link, brutally. 'I calculate he wouldn't like a pill or two in his inside, and I'm never without a six-shooter about me, so I tell you.'

His words sounded bravely enough—but still, deeming probably that the better part of valour is discretion—he moved to a few paces' distance, followed by a low growl from Piero, who had displayed from the commencement of the interview two rows of milk-white teeth, formidable to behold.

'Well now, I reckon that ar' beast knows me, and he'll be quiet; but I say, Miss Zoe, if you expect that I'll have that cuss between us two, whenever I come sparking, you're mistaken. This has been a-going on too long,

it has, and business is business, as the Kentuckian said when he cut into the pumpkin-pie.'

'I do not understand your meaning, sir,' said Zoe, speaking with a distant dignity, capable of suppressing any man less cased in vulgar self-importance than the speculator.

'Oh, you don't? Well now, I say, do I look like a coon to swallow that? Do I look like a fellar that hasn't known the tender passion? Why, I'm whittled down with thinking of you to the small end of nothing. Calculate we'll have to go, fust thing, to Saratoga Springs, and take a caution o' sarsaparilla pills besides.'

'I suppose I am to conclude from your words,' Zoe said, if possible more haughtily than before, 'you do me the honour to ask my hand in marriage. I had heard of this before from my father; but, sir, I cannot believe it possible that a gentleman—that you I mean—knowing my sentiments; and that—'

‘ All right, go a-head ; that’s allers the way with gals ; a blazing-up inside, and Wenham ice outside—all-fired sarsy, too, they are, the critturs a’ drawing of a fellar on, and then clapping on the stopper. But I don’t convene with that ar’ going on ; and so—’

‘ Pray, sir, say no more. I am sorry if I have not made myself clearly understood. I never intended to deceive you ; and am grieved to think that my father should have given you hopes which it is utterly impossible for me to ratify.’

She rose as she spoke, and with her graceful head thrown back with a gesture of command, she was sweeping past him—her hand still on the good mastiff’s collar—when Link, placing himself before her, barred her passage to the door.

‘ Well, now,’ he said, clapping at the same time his palmetto hat upon his head, ‘ if that don’t beat creation. It kinder makes me larfe to hear yer ;’ and catching hold of

her skirt, he threw himself on the nearest chair, forcing her rudely towards him.

At this climax to an affront which the passionate Southern girl would at that moment have avenged at the peril of her life, Piero, springing from her relaxing hold, dashed upon her insulter, and placing his strong forepaws upon his shoulders, held him pinioned there.

'Cuss him to hell,' roared Morse, in an agony of terror; 'call him off, can't you?' and in the extremity of his alarm, he liberated Zoe from the hold which he had laid upon her.

The girl laughed—a wild hysterical laugh; in which a sense of the ridiculous was largely mingled with hatred and disgust.

'Hats off! good Piero,' she said, and clapping her hands encouragingly, she pointed to the broad palmetto hat slouching over the Yankee's mean grey eyes—'Hats off, good dog, and teach this *gentleman*,' she added, in a tone of bitter scorn, 'that it is

not the custom, at least in civilized countries, to address a lady in her own drawing-room, with a covered head.' She had no need to repeat her lesson, for Piero trained to the trick, and eager to distinguish himself, lost not a moment in obeying her command, and seizing the famous palmetto hat in his formidable jaws, wagged his great tail in happy consciousness of victory.

Thoroughly cowed for the moment by this unexpected attack, Morse bore at first in revengeful silence the reproach with which Zoe coupled her appeal to her four-footed guardian. It did not take him long, however, to recover himself, and he was on the point of accosting the retreating girl in terms more energetic than polite, when Cæsar entered the room, bearing in his hand a tray laden with champagne bottles and tumblers.

'I say, you ducky,' said Link, speaking in a voice still husky from affright—'I say, you ducky, clar out now with that ar' dog, and if

you'll choke him, I'll give a five-dollar piece. And as for you, gal, darn it, don't you know you've got to buckle to? Your father's near about slung to hell, I reckon. Hasn't got so much as a cusst red cent belonging to him. Them upper-crust folks as thinks they're made of another sorter clay from the rest o' God's creation, they have to come down sometimes to corn dodgers and sweet potatoes. Yer wouldn't convene now to see the Squire a *mean white** would yer? By Gawd there he is a walking in the garden. Squire,' he said, calling to him from the window, 'you'll oblige me now if you jest come reound this gal o' yourn. She isn't sry, and that's a fact. Come, now, spose yer tell her slick how matters stand, and that—'

'Leave her to me,' said Gordon, on whose face the terrible emotions of the last few

* A term applied to an immense proportion of the population of the Southern States. It comprises all white people who are not possessed of property, and who, being too proud to labour, lead a life of idleness and degradation.

hours had done the work of years. 'Leave her to me, and I will answer for her obedience to my wishes. Zoe,' he continued, addressing his daughter, 'retire to your own room, and in an hour's time I shall expect you to listen to me with obedience and respect.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

‘ Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight.’

‘ I WRITE to you, my only friend, my only love, in the hope—the almost certain hope—that you will save me. Since you left me I have gone through such dreadful scenes! That man, that odious, wicked man, was left alone with me by my father—think of that, Charley! By my father! I cannot tell you all that passed, but you will believe I was not mild nor patient. Then my father came again, and—and—after the man went away he told me in cruel, dreadful words that must be Morse’s wife, or he would curse me as I knelt and prayed before him. He had no pity, Charley, not a grain; and when I told him I would rather die than yield, he bade me think upon my mother’s dying

words. For she did say them, Charley. She charged me never to desert my father! I wept and sobbed in my deep, bitter anguish; I said that I would work and toil for him, devoting myself throughout my life to him and him alone; but I might as well have pleaded to a stone; for, indeed, this man has so entrapped him in his toils that, even if he would, I feel he dares not show me mercy. You are my only hope, dear Charley, and if you fail me—but you will not, Dear. I am so poor, and sad, and desolate! In a week they say I am to be married. Married! Ah! Heavens! and to this coarse, cruel man! But you will save me, Charley—for you are not angry with me now—and this letter will be put into your hands long, long before the hour when you threatened—no, no, you did not threaten your poor Zoe. So I will try to feel quite sure. I will not shed another tear, but pray for you, dear love, and lay me down upon my bed this night to think of you till morning dawns. Angy will take this

letter for me. She has promised to give it safely to you. I would have trusted Cæsar, rather, but my father says that he must wait on Mr. Morse and himself at dinner, and lose his Saturday's holiday. God bless you, dear one; how I count the moments till I hear from you. But, for my sake, be cautious. Morse is a treacherous coward, brutal and revengeful. I shall have no peace, love, for a single moment till we both are safe upon the open, glorious sea; and then my father—but I must not think of him. Time presses, and there is Angy standing near, all ready for her walk. God grant she may be swift and faithful; but, I know not why, a strange presentiment of some dreadful evil haunts me, and it needs all my trust in God, and in my own best love to support me through the torments of suspense.'

'You will take this letter, Angy, if you please, to the St. Charles, and ask for Mr. Seymour. You need not say you are my

servant,' she added, in a low tone and with averted face; 'it is only to tell him—only to—Angy, may I, can I trust you? I am so lonely here, so friendless, and—'

'You want dis chile to see your sweet-heart, Missie Zoe,' put in Angélique, using, half in seeming playfulness, more of the negro phraseology than she usually mixed up with her conversation. 'Well, *bimeby* I will, for I feel kinder streaked to see yer look so colicky.'

'By-and-by, Angy! That will not do, for you must go at once; and here'—hastily drawing a ring of some value—'take this; I will redeem it with twenty dollars when you bring an answer to my letter.'

'Nebber fear—I'll bring it. I'll just fix myself a bit, and then be off like iled lightning to the hotel.'

She took the ring, and long before Zoe could make up her mind whether or not she had acted prudently in confiding her secret to Angélique, the place where the coloured

girl had stood was empty, and Zoe was left alone.

‘Whar der you be going to, so slick, Miss Angy? Seems like yer’ve got your Sunday-go-to-meetin’ clothes on—all hot and ready, like a buckwheat cake.’

These remarks on Angy’s personal appearance proceeded from old Sam, the coachman, as he met her an hour after walking rapidly along Canal Street, and in a costume differing widely from her usual morning dress. On her head, *fixed* (according as she conjectured) to the newest fashion, was a head-dress composed of a staring wreath of corn-flowers and poppies, over which she had drawn, for temporary concealment, a gigantic sun-bonnet. Her dress was of blue faded gauze, looped up from the dust, and displaying a course, white-calico petticoat, while over her shoulders she had flung a Paisley shawl of many colours.

‘You clar out, ole darkey,’ was her response to the mild chaffing of her fellow-

servant; 'I'm gwine on an errant for Missie Zoe, who I 'xpects got what white folks call de tender passion; she's run down to a withered cornstalk, and's nebber ate as much as a sweet potatum all the day.'

'Well, but wherebber ar' yer gwine to in all dat ar' tarnation toggery?' persisted Sam, who was not destitute of the feeling of curiosity, and who felt mystified by the amount of splendour exhibited in Mademoiselle Angy's attire.

'Whar am I gwine? What's dat to you? I am gwine where it isn't likely you'll be showing your black face. I'm a-gwine to de ball, sar, where de free ladies ar', I am, and you won't get thar no way you can fix it.'

At this announcement, delivered as it was with a dignity and importance infinitely amusing, Sam burst into a perfect roar of laughter.

'Yaw! yaw! yaw!' he shouted, advancing in his excitement within a hand's length of the irritated damsel, who, dashing her clenched fingers, clad in soiled white gloves

appertaining to her master, into the coachman's face, sent him reeling, but still laughing loudly, across the street.

'Take dat,' she cried, 'and don't you t'ink I'm gwine to elerbate myself to a lebel wid a black niggar like you, ole hoss. You make tracks, I tell yer, and don't 'xpect me to hum afore the morning.'

When Angélique tripped on towards the scene of gaiety to which she was bound (namely, a third-rate Quadroon ball, in one of the low quarters of the city), the chimes of the old Spanish cathedral in the Place d'Armes were loudly clanging out the hour of nine, and the letter written by the unhappy Zoe in her direst strait was still lying deep in the pocket of her faithless messenger, while she—unmindful of the agony of her who remained at home in all the torment of suspense—counted the moments ere in the whirling waltz or romping polka she should lay her clumsy siege-train against the white man's heart.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

‘ Yet I fain would die !
To go through life unloving and unloved,
To feel that thirst and hunger of the soul
We cannot still :

I am weary
Of the bewildering masquerade of life.’

‘ You gave the letter, Angy, as I directed.’

‘ Into his own hand, missus—The gen’l’mán
— Massa Seymour—he war berry pleased, and
bed me tank you, and say he would be here
some day.’

‘ Some day !’ And now almost her very
hours could be counted out, while he she
trusted so ! could it be that he had fulfilled
his threat ? What if disgustd by her cool-
ness and reserve he had already left the city
and was miles away, with anger and con-
tempt within his heart ?

O Virtue—rugged nurse—stern teacher of

cold lessons harder than unknown tongues to learn! Men say you bring with you your own reward—a reward often long enough indeed in coming; while sinners triumphing in the success of their own devices, only too often have their portion in this world, and go on their way rejoicing.

To Zoe in her solitary chamber the recompense of doing right seemed so extremely doubtful, that the girl looking at what might have been, had she loved honour less and pleasure more, could see no single gleam of comfort in the narrow thorny path which she had trod.

During the hot, weary hours in the darkened rooms through which she wandered, waiting, watching, still—her lover! and still only he, filled up each anxious thought.

Where could he be? Nay, surely he would come. It was not eight o'clock or near it when she sent her letter; and Angélique—why she had repeated many times and often that *he* had read the letter—

that he would come — that — but here a chilling dread possessed her, and for the first time she guessed that Angy might be false.

Once more she questioned the treacherous woman; entreating her with tearful eyes, for maidenly dissimulation was at an end, to tell her all the truth, and by her hopes of future happiness swear that she had told no falsehood.

And Angy swore! With such a solemn, fervent adjuration that her young mistress could not but believe her words, and with a heart brimful of heaviness, returned to keep her now despairing watch.

There is no need to dwell upon the time of misery endured by the two hearts whom fate no less than passion had rent asunder. Seymour, after waiting in a perfect fever of suspense till the French clock upon his chimney-piece had marked an hour past the time appointed, seized the small travelling valise which he kept prepared for any sudden

journey, and leaving the hotel drove to the railway terminus.

A train was at that moment departing, and taking his ticket and his seat, the victim of mingled pride and passion was hurried away from the scene of his lost happiness.

We will not follow him on his journey, but return to the far more to be pitied Zoe, whom the man she so wildly worshipped had deserted in the terrible crisis when the happiness of her whole life hung, as it were, upon a silken thread!

But little chance had that poor feeble girl against the two—one armed with the full weight of parental authority—who held the reins of her most dreadful destiny. She did her best, poor fluttering bird, to escape from their strong toils. She did not yield without full many a struggle that shook her spirit to its centre, and almost made her reason totter on its throne. She would have died a thousand times, sooner than give herself with the youth and beauty loved and prized by

Charley, to the low monster whose mere slightest touch was degradation. She would have died, but 'twas not in the bond.' It was herself they wanted, herself to pay a debt, a gambling debt in part (she knew that later), and one contracted by the man whose peace of mind and earthly comfort had occupied her mother's latest thoughts.

'O mother,' sighed the girl as with uplifted hands she invoked upon her bended knees the tender name, 'O mother, if from your home above you note the tears of your poor broken-hearted child, forgive her if she wavers in her duty. Forgive her if in her wild despair she yearns for love and tenderness. Forgive her if in her desolation she often yearns for him whom *you* thought little worthy; and prays to God and to the Blessed Virgin Mother that she may see his face once more.'

Bending low, and with her face buried in the pillow on which her mother breathed her latest sigh, Zoe strove to trace the path of

right; strove to reconcile divided duties, and to learn how far her own selfish, fond desires beguiled her from the narrow path of right. The result was (as might be expected from all who are conversant with the weakness of woman's nature), that the unhappy girl, fearful of wrong-doing, goaded by her morbid memories of the death-bed scene, and beyond all the rest, urged on to the sacrifice by alternate threats and prayers from him to whom she owed the highest duty, yielded at last, and promised (God only knows how fearful was the sacrifice) to become the wife of John Link Morse.

CHAPTER XXIX.

‘ But alas ! to make me
The fixed figure for the time of scorn,
To point his slow unmoving finger at.’

THERE are few things, as all the world knows, more hardening to the heart than long-continued habits of self-indulgence. Nature had not made Jaspar Gordon’s inner self of sterner stuff than she had employed in fashioning the hearts of other men. He had begun life full of generous impulses, as they are called, but which in reality often means little more than a love of popularity and a difficulty in saying the important monosyllable ‘ No.’

An only son, possessed of an extensive property, which, when he entered upon it, was but slightly embarrassed, he might, indolent slave-owner though he was, have gone through life with an ample sufficiency of enjoyment,

had not the love of foreign travel seized him, and with that love the insatiate desire of passing in European cities for a millionaire, and rivalling in profuse expenditure the *diletantis* and art-treasure-appropriators who throng the capitals of the Old World.

Of course, during the years when Jaspur Gordon was counted amongst the absentees from his native land, *his* portion of that overworked and rapidly-deteriorating soil yielded year by year a smaller return for capital expended. Abuses of all kinds grew and flourished, in proportion as the vegetable product of the Louisianian sugar plantation became more scanty. His negro 'property,' from bad management of various kinds, was gradually decreasing in value; and, in short—for what need is there to enter more fully into the early causes of the planter's ruin?—when Mr. Gordon, enriched by a collection of useless articles of *virtu*, returned to his residence on Orange Creek Plantation, his affairs (which he was too indolent to look into) were

already in a state of almost irretrievable disorder.

Such a character as I have sketched in Zoe's father was not a likely one to improve under the circumstances in which, to his great disgust, he found himself. Weak, vain, and addicted to every species both of lawless and legitimate pleasure, he indulged without let or hindrance in all expensive tastes and habits ; and even when his estates became mortgaged to their fullest value, he shrunk from the stern duty of retrenchment, putting off the evil day of reflection and repentance with the *insouciance* and recklessness peculiar to the children of the South.

Gordon was not, as is the case with some men, born a gambler ; but as his better nature grew gradually deteriorated by the many shifts and expedients to which his state of half-concealed bankruptcy reduced him, he turned, as many a desperate man has done before, to the gaming-table as a last resource whereby he hoped to retrieve his desperate fortunes.

He played and lost, lost evening after evening money to the amount of many thousand dollars; while the man whom he most despised and loathed—namely, the rich boastful Yankee—was the winner of the sums which the unlucky planter found it at the moment utterly out of his power to pay.

Then it was that in the extremity of his distress he bethought him of a means—a dishonourable means, however—to free himself from his embarrassments. He had an uncle, his *dead* mother's brother, living at Philadelphia—a simple-hearted, generous old man, a bachelor and childless. To obtain aid from this relation without the mortification of betraying his own gambling difficulties (for card-playing was one of the vices which the old philanthropist would have found it difficult to forgive), was a plan which presented itself as a means of escape to the embarrassed man.

Mr. Burns was, as I have said, a philanthropist (besides being a man of literary tastes, the which, by the way, had led him to fix his

residence in a Northern city), and he had often descanted to his nephew on the duties and responsibilities incurred by the thoughtless owners of valuable human property. That he would gladly seize on the opportunity of purchasing an estate on which he had spent many happy early days, with a sister whom he had dearly loved, seemed very probable to Gordon. Here, too, was an opportunity for the old man to test the efficacy of some of his favourite theories regarding the improvement of the human race, which the charitable Mr. Burns would, his nephew felt almost certain, avail himself of. It is true that the property was heavily mortgaged, so that no person requiring a safe title could by any possibility become a purchaser. But Mr. Burns was not a business man—and in a transaction with his own nephew, too—pshaw!—he would not stop to investigate, but would become the buyer at once—and Gordon—Well, he should pay his debts of honour, and then with the remaining dollars would depart for Europe

with his daughter, leaving the old man to improve the estate for which he would have paid but half its worth—and—

But why need we pursue the hateful task of tracing the devious paths by which this self-deluded man arrived at the conclusion, that in his case to overreach was not to cheat, and that, inasmuch as he was the natural heir to the unsuspecting victim, he had a right to forestall a portion of the money which must one day be his.

But while this process of reasoning was going on in Jaspar Gordon's mind, Morse had, unknown to him, bought up the mortgages on his property, and was, in fact, his creditor for other and far heavier debts than those—so called—of honour. Thoroughly entangled was the planter now in the 'smart' Yankee's toils. And even had the latter not possessed a cunning spy—as we are aware was the case—in the enemy's camp, Gordon would have had no more chance of escape than the fly from the spider's

web, or the 'bird from the snare of the fowler.'

It was through Angélique's agency that Morse became possessed of the proof, in the shape of Gordon's own letter to his uncle, of the method for raising the wind meditated by the ruined man. Considerable ingenuity was required in the conducting of this delicate affair, but both Angélique and her employer had proved themselves equal to the emergency.

It chanced that on the same day Gordon wrote two letters; one being to Morse, entreating a short respite in the payment of the gambling debt, while the other was the important missive which contained proof irrefragable of his own nefarious intentions.

To change the envelopes containing these despatches (which were duly conveyed to Morse by his tool, Angélique) was not a difficult matter; and this done, the only solution of the affair likely to present itself to Gordon was, that in the hurry of the

moment he had inadvertently directed the letters to the wrong persons.

Everything proceeded according to the crafty Yankee's intentions; and this being the case, Morse was down upon the miserable man at once. No hope of mercy from one who, besides that he was hardened into the consistency of a nether millstone by a profession (namely, that of debt-collector for Northern money-lenders to Southern spend-thrifts), had his own wicked ends to serve, by driving into a corner—a corner in what may be truly called a torture-chamber—the selfish and weak-minded profligate.

We have already seen that the latter did not succumb entirely without a struggle to his relentless enemy. The sacrifice of his daughter—though a painful one—was as nothing when compared with the disgrace of being held up to the world as a poor, degraded, and dishonourable man; and when the idea occurred to him that, by setting the beautiful captive free, he could obtain,

through Link's desire to gain possession of her, a hold upon that rapacious individual, he seized upon it with avidity.

But though through this most barbarous and unworthy project he gained a present respite for himself, his conscience did not altogether slumber; and there were moments when he feared that a man so destitute as was Morse of every honourable feeling would fail in the verbal engagements he had entered into, and that even Zoe's marriage would turn out an unreal thing.

No one knew better than Gordon that a marriage between a white man and a coloured woman was not valid in law; but then, not only was Zoe an Octaroon, for which class much indulgence is in the Slave-States both felt and expressed; but Morse had himself avowed that he was willing to take the required oath (an unpleasant one certainly, but justified, as he declared, by the exceeding beauty of the bride) that he, John L. Morse, had coloured blood within his veins.

‘And if you’re not satisfied, old ’oss,’ he said, cordially, slapping the sensitive Southerner on the back, ‘why, we’ll be spliced again to York. Do it all full chizel, “as asy,” as the Irishman said, “as the cat would be aiting a haporth o’ butter.”’

With this promise, although extremely against his will, Mr. Gordon was forced to be content; and lulling as best he could his better feelings to repose, he absented himself as much as lay in his power from his home, where the sight of Zoe’s pale, beautiful face spoke volumes of well-merited reproach.

CHAPTER XXX.

‘Quin corpus onustum
Hesternis vitiis, animum quoque prægravat unâ,
Atque affigit humo divinæ particulam auræ.’

PLEASANT places enough, if we are to judge from the numbers by whom they are everlastingly haunted, are these same ‘bars and cafés’ of New Orleans. Pleasant places enough, as long as the ‘happy’ and endless varieties of liquors therein concocted are the servants, not the masters—the ministers to enjoyment rather than the avenging tyrants paying back the age of pain due for a moment’s pleasure.

And then, too, there are dangers attendant on the indulging in this species of festivity, which might well dissuade the wary from entering largely into the spirit of so doubtful a Pandemonium. Goblins damned, as well as

spirits of hell, are there in those brilliantly-lighted rooms — goblins mad with lust and rage—with hatred—and desperate beings heated with every evil passion incident to frail humanity. Perhaps, of all the vicious loungers round those haunts of inebriety and crime, the one more wicked than the rest was John *Hell* Morse—a mighty *toper* from his boyhood, but whose head, by nature strong above the average, had of late shown symptoms of yielding beneath the pressure laid upon it. A man cannot with complete impunity begin the day with cocktails, and running through the changes all the live-long day, of slings, and cobblers, eye-openers, and brandy smashes, wind up with Monagahela double-proof, to the accompaniments of bowie knives and shooting-irons. This was, however, the life that for three months past had been led by John Link Morse, Esq., of Boston, Mass., and bridegroom-elect of the loveliest girl that ever trod the soil of Louisiana.

‘I’m dubersome he’ll kill himself, that

chap,' was the answering remark of a young New Orleans swell, to whom an admirer of beauty had addressed the above encomium on Zoe Gordon's charms—'I'm dubersome he'll kill himself—see how his hand shakes! Why he can't hold the bottle, nohow he can fix it!'

'He looks uncommon streaky about the gills—sorter colicky, I should say—a nice coon that to go to church to-morrow—I shall be tarnation surprised if he comes up to scratch at all.'

The object of these remarks was standing with his back against the bar railings, sometimes talking maudlin nonsense to those around him, and at others glancing rapidly from side to side with an air of terrified suspicion, painful and even revolting to behold. It was an odious fact—that which had been just stated by the bar-room gossip, namely, that on the following day the fearful sacrifice was to be offered up, and Zoe, the pure, high-hearted maiden, in her fresh virgin deli-

cacy, was to become the bride of that rich drunken swaggerer.

In what way the bridegroom-expectant had contrived to evade the law, which prevents, or rather, which declares to be illegal the marriages between the races, had not as yet been ascertained—and the question had been more than once raised amongst the scandal-mongers, as to whether or not Morse would take any unusual steps to render his union with the beautiful Miss Gordon valid.

‘He’ll have some dodge, I’m thinking,’ one of his acquaintances suggested. ‘He’ll prick his hand; we’ve known that done before, and put a drop of some darkey’s blood into the wound.’

‘And swear he’s got the coloured liquid—darn it—in his veins,’ laughed a rowdy customer, with a coarse palmetto hat, placed well back upon his head, and whose general appearance suggested to any unprejudiced bystander that the wearer was fully capable

of carrying out, in his own person, any of the 'smart operations' above alluded to.

'Seems he's got old Gordon hard and fast. Hell Morse warn't born yesterday, I tell you. He cut his eye teeth right smart, he did.'

'And, in a general way, Gordon's a born fool. He hadn't oughter to let that fellar get ahead of him. Lord knows how it was. 'Pears that he got hold of another chap as didn't know about the mor'gage, and was gwine to deal, sell up slick, and tote away to Europe.'

And Hell—he found it out—and this's what's come of it. Got hold of that fine gal along of old Gordon's rascality. Well, he was a fool—the swell-head democrat—to let the Yankee chaw him up so easy. Tarnation goney, warn't he? But then you see an empty bag can never stand up straight, and Gordon, he never had no ballast in his knowledge-box. Allers a boastin of his forrin friends to Europe—and Monseer Adolf's fricassees.'

'He's fricasseed himself, I reckon—catawhampously chawed up, and ready to make tracks, as I am told, to Texas.'

'He'll never do no good. The critter's all bunkum and no brains. But I say, this letting off the steam makes one tarnation dry, and my biler seems like wanting filling up, I kalculate.'

Whereupon the two congenial acquaintances adjourned to the bar, and, as I need not add, *liquored* to their hearts' content.

CHAPTER XXXI.

‘Terror without and treachery within;
The chalice of destruction full.

.
. And where is hope?’

IN civilized countries—or I should rather say in England especially—it is so rare an occurrence for marriages to be contracted between parties, one of which, the weaker and the frailer, is led as a victim to the hymeneal altar, that very few, if any, of my readers are likely to sympathize, by reason of their own past experience, with the mental miseries of the Octaroon.

That very many enter upon wedded life with feelings of actual personal repugnance, no one will attempt to deny; but then in all such cases it is reasonable to suppose that there are qualifying and alleviating circum-

stances. The actual marriage-hour is quickly past, and often the young bride sees far beyond the intervening pillar of cloud—*id est*, the husband standing at the altar to receive her plighted vows — a brilliant land of promise. A vision bright of precious jewels worthy of Aladdin's magic garden, gold wherewith to gratify her every wish; and all at the expense of what? A conscience laden with a lie, loss of all self-esteem, and the companionship of one from whose detested presence nothing but death or crime can free her.

Very few were poor Zoe's consolations when the hated image of her betrothed presented itself to her shrinking fancy; but if her worldly counterbalancings were few, at least there was no self-reproach mingled with her bitter repinings. In all things she could lay her hand upon her heart, and say that to the best of her knowledge and belief she had done her duty. No expectations of earthly pleasure or aggrandizement had led her to

choose of her own free-will the man who now so eagerly awaited the moment when he could pounce upon his prey; and when she, with 'her maiden cheek as pale as death,' and

'Her hands as icy cold,'

would follow him to his home, a loveless victim, dreaming 'foul dreams of fearful imagery,' and seeing, turn where she would, no loophole for escape.

How very quick the hours and days rolled on! Three only now! How short it seemed—the time that lay between her and her awful destiny! Three! Why, one is spent and gone already, lost in the unfathomable gulf of time, to rise no more for ever!

Two only yet remain—two nights and days, wherein to weep and pray, with none but God to hear her. On the last morning but the one which marked the eve of the fell sacrifice, the girl awoke from a strange, horrid slumber with a cry of pain. Her own sharp cry aroused her, as it echoed through the large,

cool, barely-furnished room ; and in an instant, casting off in part her troubled slumbers, she lifted up her weary head and stared around her, as if still bewildered by a fearful dream.

She had been carried back in fancy to the *Pensionnat* in the dull old street, into the little bedroom too, hid with its twin beds in a small, snug alcove, where she and Pauline, after their evening prayers, would lie and prattle to each other till the small hours had struck. A pretty room it was, with a well-*frotté*d floor, and chairs covered with old yellow Utrecht velvet, while upon the walls were prints of sacred subjects—our Saviour's birth and crucifixion, and the blessed Mary nursing, beneath her crown of glory, the Son of Man and his Redeeming God.

In the wondrous world of visionary sight, Zoe had beheld that peaceful room again, but not as she had seen it in the days before the darkening clouds of life had gathered round her, growing so quickly into gloom from the one small, snowy fleck not bigger than a

woman's hand, which first gave out its warning from the sky.

The little chamber in the Rue La Grange was no calm maiden's bower, when Zoe, in her dreams, beheld it once again ; for on the the bed—the little narrow bed, which once was hers, there lay a livid corpse, with glazed, wide-open eyes, most fearful to behold. But though a corpse, the dreadful *thing* seemed sentient, for between its clay-cold rigid arms, it pressed her, and she, looking with bated breath into the ghastly face, saw there the well-loved features of the man, who, in her sorest strait, had left her to endure her agony alone.

With a wild scream, and a strong effort of her will, she seemed to break from his embrace, and then with face as white as the fine cambric screening her panting breast, and with her forehead bathed with dew, she woke to know it was a dream.

A dream—a phantom visitant calling from its 'cells of crystal silence' the fierce memory

of his passionate love, and whispering to the poor weak helpless 'straw,' tossed on the wild crests of the foaming waves, that to be loved by *him*, even were he but the death-like image of his once living self, and to be clasped to his cold breast covered with the cerements of the grave, was heaven to the thought of resting by the side of him the law would call her husband !

She looked around her dreamily. On her toilet table lay some pretty Paris ornaments, the gifts of loving schoolfellows and friends ; and close beside her bed there hung the ivory crucifix, her mother's present to her departing child, when Zoe left her parents' side for lands beyond the sea.

Except these few, there were no other objects in the chamber to remind the girl of other, happier scenes ; and, therefore, in the confused, first moments of awakening, it seemed to her as though the long years spent in Europe were as unsubstantial facts, and that she had never left the

roof beneath whose shelter she was reposing now.

From within the dim mosquito curtains, she looked out as through a haze upon the outer world, well-pleased at first to think it all so dreamy and so dull. But soon the vision she had seen came back to her—the vision of her lover, in his shroud, with ice-cold eyes and chilling breath—and then—what was it that sent the crimson blood in torrents to her marble cheek, and made her shrink within herself in bitter shame? God knows, or rather, perhaps we should say the evil one, who is permitted—for what wise purpose we may know some day—to make his temporary dwelling in the purest hearts, and work in them a momentary madness.

CHAPTER XXXII.

‘Even the instinctive worm on which we tread
Turns, though it wounds not—then with prostrate head
Sinks in the dust, and writhes like me—and dies :
—No :—wears a living death of agonies.’

MR. JOHN LINCOLN MORSE having decided to spend the evening of that day (the day haunted throughout to Zoe by the memory of her dream) in the society of his betrothed, had made feeble and nearly abortive efforts to abstain, for a few hours at least, from the imbibing of those spirituous enemies which were gradually stealing away the brains with which nature had endowed him. Wistfully had he gazed upon the pleasant compounds gracing the St. Louis bar, and sore was the struggle in his mind before he could turn away from the glorious opportunity of lowering himself once more beneath the level of the brutes which perish.

His intention while performing this act of self-denial was to enact the lover's part with greater success than had hitherto attended his efforts to render himself agreeable.

'The gal's skittish,' he said to himself, 'and wants a feller to be all day fiddle-faddling after her, winding her skeins I reckon, like a goney, and telling her she's beautifuller than an angel, till she's so everlasting spry she don't know whether heads or heels is uppermost, and that's a fact.'

Link's hands trembled more than was altogether convenient, whilst decking himself for conquest, and drawing on a pair of light checked cotton 'pants' fashioned after the newest Paris pattern, and which he imagined would set off his personal advantages in the eyes of his *fiancée*.

'Cussed if I knows what got with me—can't hold a candle to a catamount. Dang it, everything swims round like a woman in a waltz. 'Spect I can't have drank *one* glass too much to-day, I feel tarnation streaky anyhow.'

After coming to which decision, Mr. Morse, adorned in what he jocosely termed his go-to-meetin'-clothes, stepped not over steadily into the bar, and presented himself with what might be emphatically termed an 'eye-opener.'

After this account of our friend Link's preparations for his wooing, it will readily be believed that on arriving after dinner at Mr. Gordon's house, he was well qualified (in his own opinion at least) to commence the operation of what he euphoniously termed 'fiddle-faddling.'

His first act after stumbling over Piero (an exhibition of awkwardness which, but for Gordon's intervention, would probably have seriously damaged the famous 'pants' above alluded to), was to place himself on a rocking-chair, directly opposite to that occupied by Zoe, and commence swaying himself backward and forward with irritating perseverance.

In vain did the infinitely-disgusted girl retreat farther and farther before his advances; the moment came when the wall

effectually checked her retreat, and then Link felt he had her at his mercy.

Her father was occupied with letter-writing in a distant corner of the room, and Zoe shrinking from her odious visitor's proximity, would have risen, but he laid a restraining hand upon her arm.

'Pears to me you're kinder in a hurry, miss,' he said, 'and as I've concluded to have a kiss—'

What more he would have said, and to what length he would have carried his audacity, can never now be known, for accident, coming to Zoe's rescue, put an end for the present to Mr. Link Morse's enterprises.

In stretching himself forward to snatch the kiss he had made certain to obtain, the gallant lover overbalanced himself—the chair rocked inconveniently forward, and John Link measured his length upon the floor.

Of course, when he saw his enemy laid low, Piero lost no time in adding his quota to the general confusion, and he had just com-

menced an attack on the nether person of the luckless lover, when Zoe, with a word, called him from off the prostrate man.

'Dang him,' he said, when rather sobered for the moment, he resumed his feet. 'That dog is a regular cuss—makes a man feel ugly to have a brute like that set on him.'

Seeing that his guest was thoroughly offended, Mr. Gordon exerted himself to restore peace, and so far succeeded, that Link began, after a while, to be quite confidential as regarded the state of his health and feelings.

'Guess,' he said, 'I'd best take to coffee, not that it's a decent drink for a Christian, whatever it may be for a Turk. A Monongahela smash now is yer only reg'lar anti-coliker. If you can't get the genu-ine article you may put up with a gin cock-tail, but of all things, don't you take the temperance pledge—kills a fellar off faster than yellar fever.'

While he spoke (with a thick and glutin-

ous utterance, as though his tongue were stuck with birdlime to the roof of his mouth), Mr. Gordon, for the first time realized the full extent of his own barbarity, in sacrificing his child to that low-bred drunken reprobate. Gladly would he have retraced his steps, and made any sacrifice (except that of his own comfort and reputation) to save poor Zoe from her fate. But matters had gone too far now to be undone—and besides, was there not the hope—a wicked one, it was true, but still a hope that his intended son-in-law's inveterate habits of intoxication would, ere long, bring about the desirable result of freeing Zoe from her uncongenial mate.

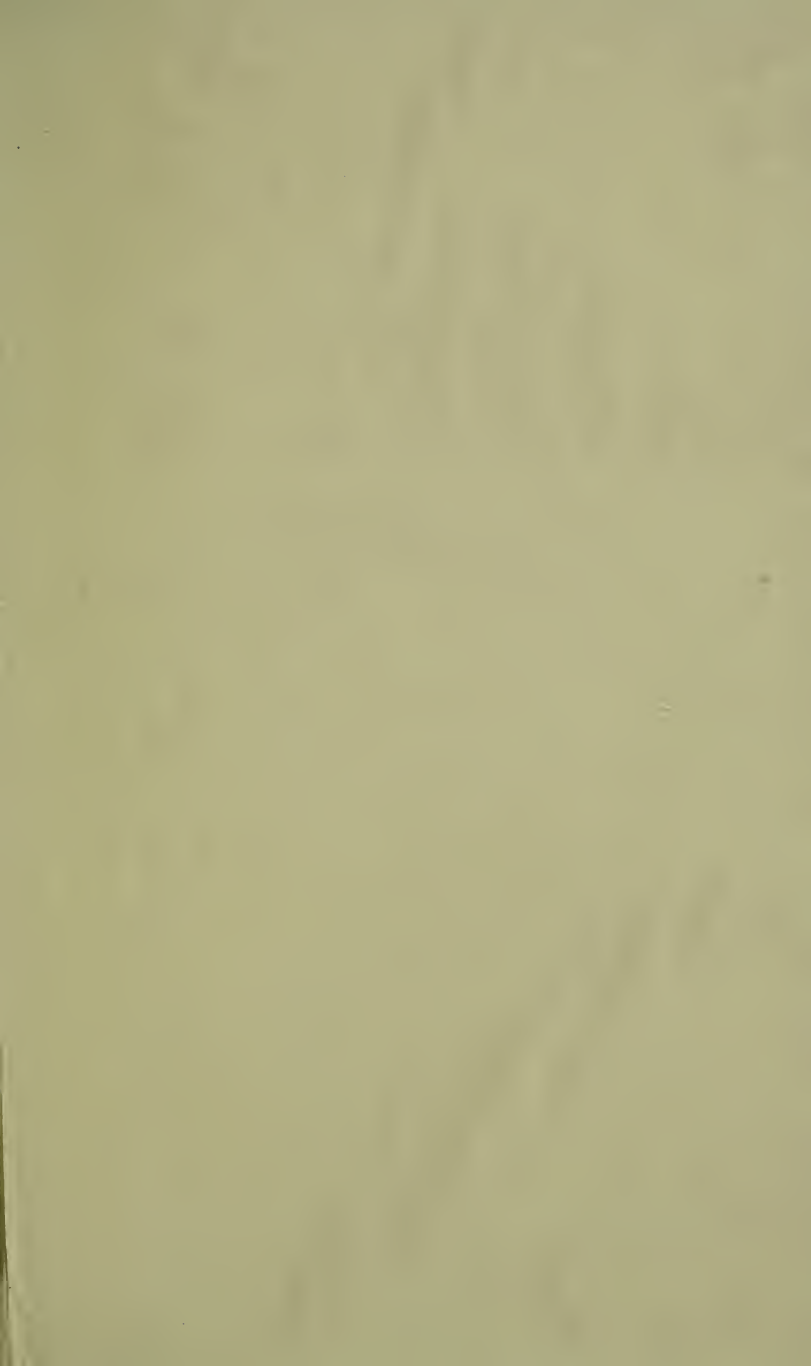
Impressed with this idea, and in fulfilment of his host-like duties, Gordon (after Zoe had, unnoticed, crept away to her own silent chamber) plied his detested visitor with potent and intoxicating drinks, while Morse, yielding to the temptation, drank both long and deep.

Towards the small hours of the morning, a

slip-shod negro waiter, with bleared eyes and wearied step, opened the door of the St. Louis Hotel to Mr. John L. Morse, who, under the guardianship of two of the city police, had been brought back *non compos mentis* to the address found in the pocket of his paletot.

Verily, Mr. Gordon's pleasant poison was beginning to take good effect.

END OF VOL. II.



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 084213369